



# The Creative Woman

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BELLES-LETTRES

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The Creative Woman is published three times a year by Governors State University. We focus on a special topic in each issue, presented from a feminist perspective. We celebrate the creative achievements of women in many fields and appeal to inquiring minds. We publish fiction, poetry, book reviews, articles, photography and original graphics.

Cover: "Threat Gesture", original mezzotint with drypoint, by G.H. Rothe.



As we go to press, the Goodman Theatre in Chicago is presenting a brilliant production of *She Always Said, Pablo*. Frank Galati has taken the words of Gertrude Stein, the visual images of Pablo Picasso, with the music of Igor Stravinsky and Virgil Thomson, to illumine the ways these 20th century geniuses influenced one another. They changed forever the way we experience our English language, the way we see the world and hear music, and the superimposition of their work is a revelation, an enthralling piece of pageantry and total theatre. In this issue, Allegra Stewart and Doris Wight also focus attention on the work of Gertrude Stein with two articles dealing with her middle period, the years following 1912, the time of her first travels with Alice B. Toklas and *Tender Buttons*.

Carole Sperlin McCauley gives us a close look at the process of creation in her profile of the important but not sufficiently recognized painter, G.H. Rothe. Two short stories examine cross-generational relationships: in Joanne Zimmerman's mordant tale, "Accommodation," we meet a nasty old woman and a too-readily corrupted twelve-year-old; when you first get into Patricia Roth Schwartz's "Endangered Species," you may feel you've entered a story outline for the next *Doonesbury* sequence—her story gives a new dimension to the concepts of both *continuity* and *generation gap* and asks us to consider whether it is the mother's activist commitment or the daughter's ecstatic freedom which is the more endangered. Eveline Lang's article is a contribution to feminist linguistic theory, a field growing in importance and sophistication. Poems and book reviews by Emily Wasiolek and Hugh Rank round out this issue. We hope you enjoy this spring bouquet of *belles-lettres*.

HEH



Photo: Kevin Horan, from the Goodman Theatre's production of *She Always Said, Pablo*.



*Kodalith of Gertrude Stein, based on Picasso's 1906 painting....*



## HIDDEN FEMINISM IN GERTRUDE STEIN'S ROSES AND ROOMS

Doris T. Wight

Roses in a potentially infinite procession, and her gnomic utterance concerning them, have won fame for Gertrude Stein among the general populace and literati alike. "A rose is a rose is a rose is a rose. . ." Hearing these syntax-shattering words, we remember them forever. Forever we see the march of roses: Gertrude's first rose, followed by a second, followed by a third, a fourth. . . All the roses look alike, "pretty maids all in a row," yet each is different. For, after all, only one rose follows the first, and only one rose fills that unique space that follows the second and precedes the third. . . Infinity is here, time in the rhythmic unfolding of word-matter, and space in the occupancy of the volume by the unfolding march of roses in the rooms of space. . .

Occupancy of the rooms of space by the individual, whether by an individual rose or by an individual woman like Gertrude Stein seeking identity: this is my subject. For rooms—as metaphors and symbols as well as literal sectionings of human habitats—dominated Gertrude Stein's thoughts at the time she wrote her greatest poetry, the legendary *Tender Buttons* and her concurrent Villa Curonia portraits. These hermetic works document Stein's hidden feminist struggle for room in space for her individual rose: herself as self-respecting woman and as artist.

*Tender Buttons* was begun during a summer journey to Spain that Gertrude Stein took with her typist Alice. Gertrude Stein and Alice Toklas were refugees that summer of 1912 from the conflict-filled rooms at 27 rue de Fleurus where Gertrude, her older brother Leo, and Alice had been living together. Originally, starting in 1903, only two people, Leo and Gertrude, had inhabited those rooms. This brother and sister pair, independently wealthy, began collecting paintings of a new style just coming to birth, a disturbing style that seemed to do disorderly things with space and perspective. Cezanne was leading the way in this revolutionary new style of art; Matisse also soon abandoned traditional perspective that showed things as they "are"; and Picasso arrived, experimenting more and more wildly. People began to visit every Saturday night at the Steins', where they could stare at these bizarre new styles and listen to Leo talk about these styles and about art. People found the Stein brother arresting. The sister didn't talk much, although she had a

beautifully cultivated voice when she did speak. It was the talking brother who was the focal center of the rooms, like the sun at the center of space.

Gertrude too looked upwards at Leo as toward light. She had always adored this older brother, and when she failed to complete medical school in America she had joined him in Europe and the two had moved into these rooms. Leo led the way in appreciating the revolutionary changes coming about in painting, with Gertrude earnestly following. The brother and sister were equals, however, when it came to decisions concerning purchase of individual art-works; here there was true equality, room for individual expression of opinion, for Leo and Gertrude bought and owned the art-works jointly. There seemed to be an acceptable apportionment of the space, with Gertrude struggling year after year to write—an endeavor which Leo never took very seriously—and with Leo talking about art and expecting himself to accomplish great things in the world. Early in 1909 Alice Toklas joined the Stein household, making more convenient her typing of Gertrude's manuscripts, and Leo claimed to like the arrangement.

At the commencement of the writing of *Tender Buttons* in the summer of 1912, however, brother and sister were not getting along together at all anymore, for Leo's attitude towards his sister was becoming more and more openly contemptuous. That fall Gertrude would write her Villa Curonia portraits, and that winter Leo would write a parody of her obscure portrait of Mabel Dodge, telling a friend in a letter:

Gertrude and even Alice have the cheek to pretend that they understand this (which I can do in part sometimes) but as Gertrude thought it very nice and I had very sarcastical intentions we evidently didn't understand it the same way.

As for Picasso's late work it is for me utter abomination. Somebody asked me whether I didn't think it mad. I said sadly, "No, it isn't as interesting as that; it's only stupid." . . . Either I have lost all my cunning in aesthetic perception or else I am superannuated, or else it is a silly blunder.<sup>1</sup>

Three days later Leo wrote even more insulting-ly about his sister to this friend:

Gertrude. . . hungers and thirsts for *gloire*, and it was of course a serious thing for her that I can't abide her stuff and think it abominable. . . Her artistic capacity is, I think, extremely small. I have just been looking over the Melanctha thing [in *Three Lives*] again. Gertrude's mind is about as little nimble as a mind can be. . . . The *Portrait of Mabel Dodge* was directly inspired by Picasso's latest form. . . Both he and Gertrude are using their intellects, which they ain't got, to do what would need the finest tact, which they ain't got

neither, and they are in my belief turning out the most Godalmighty rubbish that is to be found.<sup>2</sup>

The break was final when those letters were written, but it had not been final during the preceding summer when Gertrude and Alice visited Spain. That fall when they visited Mabel Dodge, whether Leo would permanently leave their rooms at #27 was not clear, and Gertrude was in a great state of pain and suspense about this threat.

Life without Leo as the center of the household rooms was a prospect so difficult for Gertrude to face, in fact, that it brought about a crisis in her writing and a complete change in her writing style. For Gertrude Stein had always idealized what she called "family living" despite her own concealed sexual deviancy. In spite of her lesbian orientation, perhaps even causing it, Gertrude revered men. She criticized but adored her father, and did not respect her mother much, as her disguised depiction of her parents in her family-history novel, *The Making of Americans*, illustrates. Similarly, she idolized her educational mentor, Pragmatic philosopher William James. Despite the decentered universe that modern painting and the other arts, including her own writing, were intuitively depicting in this post-Darwinian, this Einsteinian world, Gertrude did **not** want to relinquish a picture of the universe with a man at the head of the household, and a God at the center of the rooms of space, a God referred to by the masculine pronoun—one who had, according to the Biblical myth, created man first, and woman from a mere part of man, and for the sole function of keeping man from loneliness.

Like the Jewish males at the synagogue who thanked God daily in formal prayer that they had not been born women, Gertrude Stein too identified women with matter and evil and difference and inferiority, as being abysmally beneath men—who were seen as spirit and unity and superiority and light itself. *Tender Buttons* was begun in the struggle between Leo and Gertrude, but it records the deeper struggle within Gertrude alone concerning her self-worth as a woman and as a lesbian and as a writer.

*Tender Buttons*, then. While writing it, Gertrude had three separate notebooks going simultaneously, one labeled "Objects," one "Food," one "Rooms." Yet despite their separateness, these three books, like those of the *Divine Comedy*, present a progression from the hell of "Objects" through the purgatory of "Food" into the final paradise at the end of "Rooms" when at last the soul in spiritual agony sees the dreamed-of vision. Alice Toklas plays Gertrude Stein's Virgil and Beatrice on this classic journey to the underworld.

The opening poem of "Objects" gives us Gertrude Stein herself as an object, like all the other objects in this inferno that she will describe. She is a glass carafe—female symbol in being a container, but a complex symbol, since this particular symbol is not womanly-soft but male-hard. The carafe is also a spectacle, spectacle in a double sense: an eyeglass that sees and also an object that is seen. Gertrude, like Dante, describes her spiritual wound at the opening of her journey, depicting the carafe as being of a "hurt" color, the red of blood or the purple or green of a bruise. The interpretation of this short blast of poetry can go on and on.

#### A CARAFE, THAT IS A BLIND GLASS

A kind in glass and a cousin, a spectacle and nothing strange a single hurt color and an arrangement in a system to pointing. All this and not ordinary, not unordered in not resembling. The difference is spreading.<sup>3</sup>

The carafe confronts her hard world of objects, a confrontation mediated through language. Qualities recurring in this outside world, as they are in the infant's consciousness we once all inhabited, are finally localized and isolated, identified. But as in the infant's world, the identification of separate somethings is always colored by the inner forces of the individual - cravings for food, drink, warmth, caresses, and so on. This world of objects is always perceived in terms of its recurring, identifiable qualities. From the beginning, the sexual drive is operating, and the qualities are being lined up with male and female polarities.

Leo appears immediately in the second poem of "Objects" in the guise of "Glazed Glitter," a spirit resplendent in power, hard and handsome and clean and spit-and-polished shining and whole: God and Satan in one. Alice Toklas comes forth in the third poem, completing the triangle. "A Substance in a Cushion" portrays woman as softness, sweet and dissolvable rather than callous and hard and eternally enduring. "Objects" thus will tell the story of the battle between woman as matter and man as spirit, between hard and soft, between white and the colors, between similar things and different things, between a whole galaxy of oppositions, but the story is told ostensibly through the commonest of everyday objects: "A Box," "Mildred's Umbrella," "A Red Stamp," "A Piano." Some of the so-called "objects" mock our sense of logic, for other titles include "A Piece of Coffee," "A Little Called Pauline," "Suppose an Eyes," "It Was Black, Black Took." This unorthodox writing reaches a climax in a series of images concerned with books, with writing—with the disguised current problem that Gertrude was having with Leo's not respecting her writing.



The end of "Objects" has poems like "Peeled Pencil, Choke"—and Gertrude of course is that skinned, peeled pencil choking. The very last poem pleads wildly "This is This Dress, Aider," which decoded reads "This is distress, Ada"—Ada being a fictional name that Gertrude often gave Alice Toklas.

Purgatory after the inferno of "Objects," the second section of *Tender Buttons*, is a world labeled "Food," and the desire expressed again and again is for the fulfillment of incorporating the external into oneself in all possible ways, including the sexual. In the first poem here, "Roastbeef" (note the female "rose" hidden within "roast"), Gertrude passionately begs her lover Alice to let herself be eaten, to provide Gertrude with nourishment and pleasure: "Please be the beef, please beef, please be carved clear, please be a case of consideration."<sup>4</sup> This "Food" section again ends with a crisis, once more centered on Gertrude's writing ambitions and her need for Alice's support. "Art, I choke!" is wailed out through the disguise of the vegetable "artichoke," and so on. The section ends with the crucial question of a "Center in a table," metaphor not only for Leo as head of the rooms at #27, but also for the religious question of God in his heaven.

"Act so there is no use in a centre" are the opening words of the "Rooms" section, the climactic third part of *Tender Buttons* which, unlike the earlier two sections, runs on as a continuous unit for pages and pages, as if representing the endless rooms of space itself.

Act so there is no use in a centre. . . A whole centre and a border make hanging a way of dressing . . . If the centre has the place then there is a distribution. There is a contradiction and naturally returning there comes to be both sides and the centre. . . The author of all that is in there behind the door. . . So the shape is there and the color and the outline and the miserable centre. . .<sup>5</sup>

The question of a vertical, great-chain-of-being world with God, light, spirit, and male humans at the top versus the pluralistic conception of the horizontal many, including females, is fought out again, but now for a last time. Resolution will finally occur only at the very last paragraph of "Rooms," written afterwards, and with the help of Stein's previous working-through of the problems in her portraits of Mabel Dodge and of Constance Fletcher.

When Gertrude and Alice had returned from their Spanish summer in 1912, with *Tender Buttons* begun but unfinished, and the question of continued living with Leo unresolved, they went to visit a rich American woman in Italy, Mabel Dodge. Mabel's husband Edwin, an architect,

had designed the wonderfully spacious Villa Curonia, where, as Gertrude described it in the opening of "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia,"

The days are wonderful and the nights are wonderful and the life is pleasant.<sup>6</sup>

Edwin Dodge was away in America during Stein's visit, but despite the architect-creator's absence, a ceaseless flow of guests, like souls visiting earth for their brief life stay, came and went at the villa. The openness of the villa seems to have had a powerful effect on Stein, perhaps reinforcing the sense of freedom that, despite her spiritual anguish, she had felt in Spain. She wrote of the freedom to breathe at the early part of Mabel's portrait, and alluded to the rooms of the villa directly again in the final paragraphs:

So much breathing has not the same place when there is that much beginning. So much breathing has not the same place when the ending is lessening. So much breathing has not the same place and there must not be so much suggestion . . . There is not all that breath. . . There is not that differentiation. There is that which is in time. There is that room that is the largest place when there is all that is where there is space. . .<sup>7</sup>

Rooms and the battle over space and of how to conceive of space are at the heart of the portrait of a fellow guest named Constance Fletcher as well. In this portrait again, references occur to space and rooms and doors, as well as, here, to writing. Constance Fletcher was a famous writer, and her presence at the villa gave Gertrude a chance to confront directly her crisis of morale caused by Leo's scorn of her own writing attempts:

There was the writing and the preparation that was pleasing and succeeding and being enterprising. It was not subdued when there was discussion, it was done where there was the room that was not a dream.<sup>8</sup>

"The writing and the preparation" refer to Gertrude's writing efforts. "It was not subdued" alludes to her enterprise, threatened "when there was discussion" with Leo in which he was critical of his sister. "The room that was not a dream" rejects the literal argument-filled rooms back at the shared apartment in favor of rooms conceived of as space, as "room" for breathing, opportunity, freedom.

Mark the data that tells the merit of having that time to state that not to wait is to say that the door has been entered. If to wait marks the place where the entrance if it is made comes to be approached then to do what is not done is to do all that and carefully that which is solid does not fill the space.<sup>9</sup>

Here "the door entered" is "a definite decision made." "That which is solid" and "does not fill the space" refers to matter, the solidity of limited and limiting individual facts. Opposed to narrow perceptions are the broader visions of life's "spaces," possibilities for fresh outlooks, fresh thinking, fresh solutions to problems.

There where the time is not cruel is the place where the time is what is filling the half and the whole and no passage that has that intention can be intended when that which is solid is not building every house. All houses are open that is to say a door and a window and a table and the waiter make the shadow smaller and the shadow which is larger is not flickering.<sup>10</sup>

"Where the time is not cruel" is the kinder realm of intangibles like ideas, potentialities, of immortality as opposed to mortality, and so on. "All houses are open" expresses that all individual entities in life open out to everything else, are not isolated. "A door and a window" are openings; they allow ingress and egress, join things. "A table and the waiter" refer to many things, and are prominent also in *Tender Buttons*. Allusions to eating extend to civilization and its eating practices and rituals, as well as to religion with tables of sacrifice to gods and with their waiting, praying human congregations of believers. "Making shadows smaller" indicates making things clearer, brighter, so that the shadows of the unknown or the threatening are reduced. "The shadow which is larger" described as "not flickering" perhaps points to the mysteries and potentialities remaining beyond human comprehension, however far we extend our knowledge.

These concluding lines of the portrait of Constance Fletcher, like the concluding paragraph of *Tender Buttons*, portray, despite the oceans that had encircled her, Gertrude's final working-through of her spiritual crisis. She would reluctantly let go the idea of a God-centered, male-centered, human-centered universe, but she would make the "sensible decision" to retain it as well, though in altered form. She would accept the new difference, "wrongness," as well as the old unity, "rightness." She would follow her feelings and accept contradictions. She would relinquish the idea of a just God ordering all, but she would readmit the idea in a broadened view of "incredible justice." If she must lose father and brother as gods, and would continue to reject an omnipotent Father God (in Spain both Alice and she had been tempted to become Catholics), still she would find consolation in some mysterious, gender-free "care" that perhaps ruled with a wisdom we cannot grasp. Like her beloved Pragmatic mentor William James, who had come to somewhat similar conclusions, she

would "Will to Believe," because this attitude freed her from the artistic aridity and despair into which her brother's criticisms of her writing had plunged her. Here, ending in a great hymn to living and breathing itself, is the hermetic concluding paragraph of "Rooms" in *Tender Buttons*:

*A light in the moon the only light is on Sunday. What was the sensible decision. The sensible decision was that notwithstanding many declarations and more music, not even notwithstanding the choice and a torch and a collection. . .not even withstanding more cultivation and some seasoning, not even with drowning and with the ocean being encircling, not even with more likeness and any cloud, not even with terrific sacrifice of pedestrianism and a special resolution, not even more likely to be pleasing. The care with which the rain is wrong and the green is wrong and the white is wrong, the care with which there is a chair and plenty of breathing. The care with which there is incredible justice and likeness, all this makes a magnificent asparagus, and also a fountain. —*

Gertrude and Leo divided the paintings they had bought as a pair, Gertrude taking the Picassos and Leo the Renoirs and Matisse's. Gertrude, like Picasso plunging into Cubism, had made a philosophic and artistic and personal breakthrough into the twentieth century. She went so far when in desperation she finally made the leap, that most of us even yet cannot follow her. Moreover, her breakthrough is cast into such a hermetic form that the best most of us can do as yet is to treat her words as if they were musical notes, listening not for logic but for tone. If one does this, especially if one reads aloud that last celebratory paragraph of *Tender Buttons*, imagining that it is the author's own much-admired, highly cultivated voice speaking, one can break through too, via this great feminist, great human poetry, into the twentieth century. It is a decentered universe whose rooms the human beings inhabit. In some ways we still dominate nature, but in other ways there is a total subversion of former domination. There is no great mystical rose such as Dante saw, but an endless string of smaller roses marching in its stead. One truth to be seen in "a rose is a rose is a rose is a rose" is a Cubistic break-up and horizontal merging and exchanging of identities, so that a rose is a star is a pebble is a mountain is a painting made by humans, and leaves of books written by mystics like Gertrude are grass rustling in the open rooms of air.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>Leo Stein, *Journey Into the Self* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1950), 49.

<sup>2</sup>*Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>3</sup>From *Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein*, ed. Carl Van Vechten (New York: Vintage Books, 1962), 461.

Cont. on page 22.



# **"PORTRAIT OF MABEL DODGE AT THE VILLA CURONIA": A DETECTIVE STORY**

Allegra Stewart

*Anything is a detective story if it can be found out.*  
(GHA, 84)\*

Interpreting a composition of Gertrude Stein's middle period may require a bit of sleuthing, in the course of which the sleuth employs every available method: he follows blind paths and ends up in cul-de-sacs. In a metaphor from the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at Villa Curonia," "all legs are used.\*\* But as Bergson said, "explanation always consists in resolving. . .the unforeseeable and new into elements old or known." (CE, 181) In view of Stein's conspicuous stylistic mannerisms it behooves the critic to examine the surface of her work for such familiar elements as repetition (of both words and grammatical structures), cadence, rhyme, puns and homonymy ("he had his hymns in him"), unexpected juxtapositions and disjunctions, and *non sequiturs*. What baffles the textual explicator, however, is the dissociation of words from familiar contexts. From piece to piece, moreover, the same words recur. Thornton Wilder thought her devoted readers should compile "a lexicon of her locutions." As he saw it, "The task of her future commentators will consist in tracing them (her locutions) to their earliest appearances embedded in a context which furnishes the meaning they held for her." (FIA, xx1)

Sometime the words of a given piece seem to form a configuration. If one focuses upon them he may discover, amid ambiguities and obscurities, a surprising coherence — surprising because the meaning unveiled may have little to do with the ostensible subject given in the title.

Much useful information about Stein's background and the details of her daily life has come from the reminiscences of her friends and their prefaces to her books. Having identified an actual Lucy Lily Lamont as the inspiration of the "Lucy Lily Lily Lucy" lyric in *Four Saints in Three Acts*, Karl Van Vechten declared that the key to many of Stein's obscurities would be found only in her personal history:



The books of this artist are indeed full of sly references to matters unknown to their readers and only one completely familiar with the routine, and roundabout, of Miss Stein's daily life would be able to explain every line of her prose. (SW, xiv)

Her biographers and critics have scrutinized and are continuing to explore the implications of her work. Stein herself, of course, has given us in her autobiographical and critical writings a great deal of insight into her goals and intentions, but little aid in the interpretation of particular pieces. Often her explanations — as in *An Elucidation*, "Portraits and Repetition," or even "A Transatlantic Interview" — can be as cryptic as the texts they were meant to clarify.

We know from "Portraits and Repetition" that Stein turned away from fiction to "portrait" writing in an effort to rid herself of narrative — to avoid telling about "any one doing or even saying anything" (LIA, 174) and that, inspired by cubism, she struggled to express a new vision. Abandoning the whole of the narrative tradition

\*Abbreviations are listed at the end.

\*\*\*"The Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia," paragraph 23. To permit easy identification of quotations from this portrait, the paragraphs have been numbered.

of English literature, she composed portraits conveying "the rhythm of anybody's personality." A portrait became for her a kind of concentration of her own vitality as well as of the vitality of the "sitter," in terms of his characteristic interests and subjective preference. "How do you like what you have is an important question to ask and can produce a portrait of anyone," she said. (LIA, 171) Increasingly her portrait writing became a "present thing," a description of people "as they are existing" (LIA, 175) — in other words, a distillation of the essence of a personality in a concentrated moment of her own experience. But to abstract from a life time is difficult, and to achieve her goal she turned to the "still-lives" of *Tender Buttons*, restricting herself at first to "looking at that thing." (LIA, 190)

Composed in 1912, perhaps before the completion of *Tender Buttons*, "The Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia" is one of Stein's first pieces embodying her effort to exclude narrative from her writing and it illustrates in a variety of ways her growing tendency toward abstractionism. Though it may not loom large in the vast body of her work, it assumes importance as a transitional piece and as the first of Stein's compositions in the new style to gain publicity. Shortly after it was written, Mabel Dodge had it printed, sent copies of it to her friends, and soon took it to New York, where early in 1913 she published a critical essay on it called "Speculations" (*Art and Decoration*, March 1913). Though it has been denied intrinsic merit, it has been noted that in comparison to Stein's "monotonous repetitiveness" in the earlier portraits, "this one does constantly stretch and test the imagination." (Bridgman, GSIP, 121)

When "The Portrait of Mabel Dodge" was first circulated it provoked conflicting responses. To Leo it was sheer nonsense (*Journey*, 55). Mabel Weeks neither understood nor enjoyed it ("Mabel Weeks didn't like my last manner.") Logan Pearsall Smith was, his friends thought inexplicably, delighted with it. Mildred Aldrich seemed to learn something about Mabel from reading it ("Mildred Aldrich just read it and said she had no idea you were so energetic and comfortable" (M&S, 30). Mabel herself bubbled over with enthusiasm:

I must snatch a lucid moment when "argument is clear" to tell you that I consider the "Portrait" to be a masterpiece of success from my (& your) point of view **as** a portrait of **me as** I am to others. (FFF, 65)

She regarded it as an accurate description of herself:

In fact it is so faithful a portrait as, I think, to produce about the same effects as myself were the

truth always said! I think it better & better as time goes on & they say more & more things. Some days I don't understand it, but sometimes I don't understand myself, past or about to come. (FFF, 66)

If we are to find a resemblance between Mabel Dodge and her portrait we need to know something about her. From the autobiographical writings and correspondence of these two women we glean something of the time, place, and circumstances of the composition of the portrait as well as what each thought of the other, but Stein's comments on Mabel Dodge are few, brief, and guarded. In *The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas* Mabel is described as "a stoutish woman with a very sturdy fringe of heavy hair over her forehead, heavy long lashes, very pretty eyes and a very old-fashioned coquetry" (159) and Berenson is reported to have called her a "femme fatale." (132) In her *Intimate Memories* Mabel devoted a chapter to The Steins (Gertrude and Leo).

According to Mabel, she first met Gertrude Stein in 1911, when on a visit to Paris, she was taken by a mutual friend to a Saturday evening at 27 rue de Fleurus. She returned to Florence with the manuscript of Stein's *Making of Americans* and presently wrote a letter to express her admiration for it. Judging from the salutation and signature on this letter, dated April 1911, which opens "Dear Miss Stein" and closes with "Always sincerely yours with the greatest admiration, — Mabel Dodge," (FFF, 52) their relationship was formal. Stein must have been in Florence in the late spring or early summer of 1912, for there is a letter dated June 23, 1912, in which Mabel now addresses "Dear Gertrude," speaks of missing her, reports a "screamingly funny" episode that has just occurred, and signs "with love." (FFF, 60-62) Their friendship lasted until after the publication of *Tender Buttons* in 1914; after that for reasons probably involving Stein's egotism as a writer, the friendship lapsed.

"The Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia" originally had an alternate title: "Mabel little Mabel with her face against the pane." (Bridgman, GSIP, 120) Though the pun on pane/pain is obvious, the words and rhythm are tinged with satire and have an overtone of sentimentality. It is hard to take Mabel Dodge seriously, yet she has a certain literary stature in her own right and she managed to know a great many of the most talked-about contemporary artists and writers of her time. Though in 1912 she had as yet been married only twice, she ultimately had four husbands at the churchdoor, not to mention other company in youth and middle age. Her career was launched, when, a young widow with an infant son, shortly after



the death of Karl Evans, her first husband, she married Edwin Dodge, a wealthy American architect. Since she was as strongly attracted to women as to men, she probably married Edwin Dodge for the security and stability marriage entailed. For her day she was certainly an emancipated woman, but no feminist. Fred B. Millet called her "one of the most striking if preposterous figures on the contemporary scene."

Her massive series of autobiographical volumes . . . are chapters in one of the most amazing autobiographies written by an American woman. Mrs. Luhan had the fascinated self-absorption of the born diarist and autobiographer. She is probably as honest a person as one of her essentially romantic nature can be. Unmatched. . . as a collector of literary and artistic personalities, Mrs. Luhan after her escape from the convention-ridden life of bourgeois Buffalo, gathered around her in New York, Italy, and New Mexico, an amazing number of names that make literary news. Exacting and wilful, mystical and ruthless, she has made her way through the lives of countless admirers and hangers-on. Of herself and her associates, she writes with impressive if embarrassing frankness. (*Contemporary American Authors*, 1940, 175-6)

In Stein's portrait of her there are the barest hints of her self-absorption, her romantic nature, her wilfulness, and her ruthlessness. Whether she appeared "preposterous" to Stein is difficult to determine, but Stein understood her romanticism. We catch glimpses of it in a group of words expressing kinds of pleasure: "delight" ("A delight is not bent," para. 10), "bliss" ("This is this bliss," para. 12), "pleasing" ("There can be pleasing classing clothing," para. 13), "predilection" ("There is the comfort of predilection," para. 15), "pleasure" ("There is that pleasure," para. 18, and "There is no pleasure," para. 21), "laughing" ("Laughing is not evaporating," para. 14), "smiling" ("There is that smiling," para. 14), "beguiling" (" . . . which is beguiling," para. 14), and finally "not solemn" (" . . . relieving that situation is not solemn," para. 22). It is Mabel's imperious manner we hear in "An argument is clear," (para. 4), and her presence we feel in the following sentences:

Gliding is not heavily moving. Looking is not vanishing. Laughing is not evaporating. There can be the climax. (para. 14)

We learn from reading Mabel Dodge's *Intimate Memories*, especially the second volume, *European Experiences*, that Mabel's marriage to Edwin Dodge was for her a pedestrian affair. Though he supplied her with a safe base of operations in her forays into more romantic affairs, she was never a contented wife:

But this Boston man, in his superficial way making everything common place! . . . What a universe bet-

ween him and me! I so deep, so fatal, and so glamorous—and he so ordinary and matter of fact! Little does he guess of the layers upon layers of perception of understanding, of feeling for things, that I carry locked in me. The things I know! (EE, 159)

Her role as hostess of the Villa Curonia became for her a compensation for a loveless marriage. She directed her energies toward making of the Villa Curonia a beautiful setting for the woman she wanted to be. In thus seeking to create for herself a satisfying persona, she succeeded to a certain extent, but it did not ring true: "How can I be expected to permeate this place with a fictitious personality! It's a miracle, what I **am** doing!" she protested. (EE, 153) In her detailed description of the Villa — its environs, its courtyard, gardens, rooms, its furniture, draperies, and art objects — she speaks of a carved door frame, which was placed against a solid wall in the north salon. For her the door was symbolic: "This door was a very fair symbol of myself at that time, for it led nowhere. Like the fireplace in the hall (the fireplace had no chimney) it was only for effect." (EE, 147) In fact as she looked at her life, the Villa became for her a prison:

The Villa Curonia loomed sumptuously about me, heavy, golden. . . carried so far towards perfection, it seem important to me,—a career in itself. I had given so much thought to it—so much time—I had lived desperately and in despair into every nuance and every glint seeking to lose my desire in them. In a lack of love I had tried to pass out of longing into materials—and out of passion I had built my house. Now I was caught and entangled in it—inseparable from it. (EE, 174)

It is tantalizing to search for correspondences between Mabel Dodge's long description of the villa and specific passages in Stein's portrait. With a little stretching of the imagination, a possible connection can be seen between the door leading nowhere and a door mentioned in the portrait: "there is the wide door that is narrow on the floor." (para. 21) Again, Mabel spoke of "a secret little garden all mouldy and with lichens on its flagstones," (EE, 140) which would have been destroyed had certain remodeling plans gone into effect with regard to the construction of a more imposing entrance to the villa. Shortly after the decision had been made to spare the secret little garden, Edwin accidentally "uncovered a completely buried courtyard of the best Brunelleschi type, two stories high, encircling three sides of the east interior of the Villa." (EE, 141) Once excavated this courtyard served as the main entrance and enlarged the villa. In Stein's portrait we find the following sentence: "Abandon a garden and the house is bigger." (para. 15) To accept this correlation may

require an extraordinary stretching of the imagination.

In a letter to Gertrude Stein dated June 24, 1912, Mabel gives an amusing account of the antics of the resident ghost which disturbed some distinguished guests — among them the Jo Davidsons. At one point Mrs. Davidson “suddenly left the table & dashed into the garden. We paid no attention but she came back soon & had hysterics saying someone behind her chair had pushed her out of the room.” (FFF, 61) In the “Portrait of Mabel Dodge” occurs the following passage:

A plank that was not dry was not disturbing the smell of burning and altogether there was the best kind of sitting there could never be all the edging that the largest chair was having. It was not pushed. It moved then. There was not that lifting.” (para. 16)

In Mabel’s account of the event, a priest was called in, who performed the service of exorcism, and Mabel writes: “We made a pageant thro’ all the rooms while he exorcised & blessed all over.” (FFF, 61) In the “Portrait of Mabel Dodge” we find a reference to prayer: “Praying has intention and relieving that situation is not solemn. There comes that way.” One further detail from the letter may possibly be relevant. One night, to quell the panic among her guests, Mabel tried to have them all do “deep breathing exercises” to calm them — a detail which may be reflected in the three sentences of “The Portrait” that begin, “So much breathing.” (para. 3) I shall return to these three sentences again in this paper.

There are many terms in the “Portrait of Mabel Dodge” that suggest the furnishings and the activities of a busy household. Stein characterizes the general life at the Villa Curonia in the one-sentence opening paragraph: “The days are wonderful and the nights are wonderful and the life is pleasant.” In her autobiography Mabel Dodge describes the usual routine of life at the villa amid the unending procession of visitors:

People coming to stay, motor drives all about the country to visit villages or hunt *antichita*, the usual, almost daily trips to and back for errands, for the sake of seeing someone, or for calls. . . (EE, 203)

In the “Portrait of Mabel Dodge” this kind of activity — the buying, the visiting, the arrivals and departures — appears in such words as “bargaining,” (para. 2) “packing,” (para. 5) “the expedition,” (para. 7) “departure,” (para. 18) “Nobody is alone,” (para. 10) and “Everyone was exchanging returning. . . The whole day is that way. Any one is resting to say that the time which is not reverberating is acting in partaking.” (para. 19) There are references to “blankets,” (para. 3) “a

bottle,” (para. 8) “a vase,” (para. 15) “the hall,” (para. 5) “a velvet spread,” (para. 17) There is even “that little wagon,” (para. 10) which along with “the toy that is not round,” (para. 19) may have belonged to little John Evans, Mabel’s son by her first husband.

But let us turn the kaleidoscope a little and look at another pattern in “The Portrait of Mabel Dodge.” In *European Experiences*, in the chapter devoted to the Steins, Mabel first tells that in the absence of Edwin (it may be this absence that Stein refers to in “The absence is not alternative,” (para. 3) she put Gertrude in Edwin’s study next to the “linen-hung northern room” where she herself always slept in hot weather. She put Alice B. Toklas next to Gertrude “in the little bedroom with the staircase running down from it.” (EE, 326) She then gives a picture of Stein working late at night, seated

. . . at Edwin’s table next door writing automatically in a long weak handwriting—four or five lines to the page—letting it come up from deep down inside her, down onto the paper with the least possible physical effort. (EE, 328)

On the third night after Gertrude and Alice arrived, Mabel tells us that she was visited in her room by John’s handsome tutor, who was “in love with me just as a matter of course.” His “blond, fresh, blue-eyed youthfulness” and his “long limbs and swaying shoulders” had become for Mabel “a great allurements of the flesh,” but as she explains it she “didn’t dare to take him” because of her marriage vow of faith to Edwin. Still she did not send the amorous young man away, when in the bright light of “a hot August moon,” he “crept along the red-tiled passage and breathed my name against the door.” She admitted him with caution, however, for though the walls were thick, the doors were “just ordinary ones.” The couple stood in a close embrace until, overtaken by fatigue, they “swayed toward the wide, white-hung bed—lying in one another’s arms in the white moonlight.” Only after the moon had “slid” away and the room had become “black dark” did the young man take his stealthy departure. Little was said during this visit, Mabel says. At first she kept babbling, “I can’t—I can’t—I can’t.” As he left he “breathed into her ear, ‘I love you so—and the wonderful thing about you is that you’re good!’ ” At the end of her description of this romantic encounter, Mabel quotes from Stein’s “Portrait”: “And then there was that little wagon. . .” But she quotes inaccurately; the passage actually reads: “There had been that little wagon.” (para. 10)

Gertrude Stein’s awareness of what was going on on the other side of the connecting door is scarcely questioned by James R. Mellow, who



finds in the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge" veiled reflections of this "comically prolonged seduction scene" in such terms as "adulteration" (with the overtones of adultery, para. 3) and "so much breathing" (repeated three times, para. 3). (*Charmed Circle*, 167-9). To me, too, it seems probable that Stein, no matter how concentrated her attention, was conscious, at least subliminally (on the fringe of her awareness), of the young man's footsteps in the red-tiled corridor leading to the stairs. A sentence in "The Portrait" reads:

A walk that is not stepped where the floor is covered is not the place where the room is entered. (para. 20)

And the portrait ends with a reference to a visit: "There is not all of any visit."

With this scene in mind, "The Portrait of Mabel Dodge" becomes mildly pornographic, and I find it interesting that speaking of abstract painting, Stein once said, "There is no such thing. The minute that painting gets abstract it get pornographic. This is a fact." (EA, 127) She also said, "My middle writing was painting," (EA, 180) and "I am trying to do abstract portraits in my medium, words." (Loc. cit., Bridgman, GSIP, 120) When words become as ambiguous and as "open" as they seem to be in "Mabel Dodge," a reader may find **doubles entendres** everywhere and so read into the text meanings that are suddenly **there** for him willy nilly. (I remember this happening when I came upon "a pink tender descender" in *Tender Buttons*.)

In *Seven Types of Ambiguity* William Empson refers to writers who write with the "whole weight" of their language, and he gives two examples: Racine in French and Dryden in English. In the same breath he mentions Gertrude Stein, who, he says, "implores the passing tribute of a sigh." (STA, 7) Of ambiguities there is no end in the writings of Stein's middle period, but unlike the ambiguities that concerned Empson, Stein's ambiguities are neither definite nor easily detachable. This is so, I think, because (as I have already suggested) the ostensible subjects of many of her compositions are actually their occasions rather than their main subjects. E. A. Robinson once asked Mabel Dodge a pertinent question: "How do you know that it is a portrait of you, after all?" (M & S, 137) Before Stieglitz met Mabel Dodge he was baffled by her portrait, but after he had met her he exclaimed, "I understand the portrait perfectly, now I've met her!" (FFF, 74) It should not be forgotten that Mabel herself felt that some days she did not understand it. Carl Van Vechten once said of Mabel Dodge that for her marriage was "but a springboard to a higher life." (EA,

242) Perhaps for Gertrude Stein, Mabel and her villa served merely as a springboard — not exactly to a higher life, but to another level of discourse closer to her aesthetic concerns as an artist.

In "Portraits and Repetition" Stein associated the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge" with *Tender Buttons*, indicating that they arose out of the same impulse by quoting passages from both to illustrate her effort to create "by simply looking." (LIA, 191) It was my contention in *Gertrude Stein and the Present* that *Tender Buttons* represented on the part of Gertrude Stein a process of self-realization and a ritual celebration of her escape from habit and custom into a new creativity — and that "Rooms," the third part, marked the culmination of this attempt. Read in the ambience of "Rooms," with its "container" words, the Villa Curonia becomes what it actually was — a "container" for Mabel Dodge — a container from which she longed to escape — and Stein's alternate title for Mabel's portrait — "Mabel little Mabel with her face against the pane" bears out this idea in a general way. It seems to me, however, that both *Tender Buttons* and the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia" reveal Stein's preoccupation with the processes by which a writer's creative intuitions come to verbal expression. In other words, she was engaged in exploring the contents of the stream of her own consciousness — not in Freudian terms but in terms of the mental processes described by William James in his *Principles of Psychology*: sensation, imagination, perception (of things, space, and of time), conception (involving the perception of sameness, discrimination and comparison), association, and memory.

It is pertinent at this point to call attention to the one proper name in the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge" — the given name William, which appears in the midst of a series of short sentences: "There has been William." (para. 14) It seems quite unrelated to what precedes and follows it in the paragraph and I have discovered no William in Mabel Dodge's memoirs to whom it might refer, but there is Stein's old teacher of psychology, the great William James, who had just died in 1910, and whose theories of consciousness emphasized consciousness as an unbroken stream — its contents ever changing, its states never recurring in exactly the same way, its parts comprised of substantive and transitive elements and "feelings of relation."

What really seems to me to link together Stein's compositions between 1909 and 1912 (and later) is a vocabulary expressive of psychological processes.

According to Stein's account of her *Tender Buttons* period, her words became increasingly detached from their ordinary associations:

And the thing that excited me very much at this time and still does is that the words or words that make what I looked at be itself were always words that to me very exactly related themselves to that thing the thing at which I was looking, but as often as not had as I say nothing whatever to do with what any words would do that described that thing. (LIA, 192)

When she spoke here of words "that related themselves to the thing at which I was looking," she implied a minimum of conscious choice — the words "related themselves" to the object of perception. This naturally raises the question of automatic writing. Was she writing in a state of relaxed or dispersed attention, or was her attention concentrated upon its object? I think she tried to write in all of these mental states, but in "Rooms" and "Mabel Dodge" the reader is very much aware of a conscious agency and sustained attention. None of the words seem to arise from "random association," but appear to be used very precisely, though in contexts that baffle the understanding.

Actually the difficulty in establishing what is being said in "Mabel Dodge" derives from a pervasive vagueness or generality in the objects and actions named. Though the sentences follow conventional grammatical syntax, they have only a minimal grammatical subject, some beginning with the demonstratives "this" or "that;" others, with the pronouns "it" or "they;" still others, with "there" with pronominal force in impersonal constructions ("there is," "there came," "there can be," etc.). A few gerunds name general activities but name no agency ("bargaining," para. 2; "breathing," para. 3; "packing," para. 4; "gliding," "looking," "laughing," para. 14; "praying," para. 22). At one moment rhymes appear briefly ("same" - "shame;" "same" - "name," para. 18 & 19) as though something had invited the mind to play; similarly in a long paragraph in which nineteen of the sentences begin with "there" used with pronominal force, is one playful sentence full of alliteration and punning: "There is the likeliness lying in liking likely likeliness." (para. 14)

Interspersed among the generalities, such things as a bottle, a vase, or a wagon give the reader a deceptive sense of familiarity. Take the word "wagon," for example. It happens to be one of the words in "Mabel Dodge" (there are many others) that are to be found in other compositions of the period. Following Wilder's suggestion to Stein's "future commentators," I have brought together five passages in which "wagon" occurs: two from *Two: Gertrude Stein and Her*

*Brother*, two from *Tender Buttons*, and one from "Mabel Dodge:"

He had the alteration of the remaining **wagon** and he did not then feel that he had the skin that was burning when there was there what had come to be there in and out in swimming. He was not analogous. (**Two**, 128)

Correlation between the past and the connection is not the only way to achieve expression. The logic and the conception and the actuality in the **wagon** all that which is not prearranged is convincing. (**Two**, 129)

A cause and no curve, a cause and loud enough, a cause and extra a loud clash and an extra **wagon**, a sign of extra, a sac a small sac and an established color and cunning, a slender grey and no ribbon, this means a great loss and a restitution. (*Tender Buttons* — "Mildred's Umbrella" from "Objects.")

To begin the placing there is no **wagon**. There is no change lighter. It was done. And then the spreading, that was not accomplishing that needed standing, and yet the time was not so difficult as they were not all in place. . ." (*Tender Buttons*, "Rooms," para. 4)

All the attention is when there is not enough to do. This does not determine a question. The only reason that there is not that pressure is that there is a suggestion. There are many going. A delight is not bent. There has been that little **wagon**. There is that precision when there has not been an imagination. There has not been that kind of abandonment. Nobody is alone. (MD, para. 10)

Whatever "wagon" meant to Stein, in at least four of the five passages quoted, it scarcely signifies the familiar wain or four-wheeled vehicle for hauling, and in three of these passages it appears in a context containing hints of mental processes. In **Two** (p. 129) it is associated with "expression," "logic," "conception" and "actuality;" in "Rooms" it is placed near "change" and "time" and the activities of "placing" and "spreading." In the "Mabel Dodge" paragraph it occurs in a context containing "attention," "question," "suggestion," "precision" and "imagination." Since all of these words associated with "wagon" are relevant to processes of thought and feeling, I hazard a guess that "wagon" stands for some kind of "relation" or "connection" — a "vehicle" in a train of thought. (My audience must bear with this highly speculative idea. I offer it tentatively, yet with conviction.)

If the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge" is read with the processes of consciousness in mind, other words assume significance — "intention," for example, which occurs three times in the first seven paragraphs:

The **intention** is what if application has that accident results are reappearing. (para. 2)



This does not assure the forgetting of the **intention** when there has been and there is every way to send some. (para. 6)

As the expedition is without the participation of the question there will be nicely all that energy. They can arrange that the little color is not bestowed. They can leave it in regaining that **intention**. It is mostly repaid. There can be an irrigation. They can have the whole paper and they send it in some package. It is not inundated. (para. 7)

I suggest that Stein's "intention" in the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge" was essentially to overcome the limitations of language habits and the modes of conceptual abstraction in the expression of the immediate data of consciousness, and particularly to explore the interstices in a concatenated stream of thought in the hope of catching on the wing the fleeting "feelings of relation," many of which, according to James are so vague as to be unnamed. James had sought to re-instate the vague in mental life and in doing so had noted the richness and complexity of the stream of consciousness:

Every definite image in the mind is steeped and dyed in the free water that flows round it. With it goes the sense of its relations, near and remote, the dying echo of whence it came to us, the dawning sense of whither it is to lead. The significance, the value, of the image is all in this halo or penumbra that surrounds and escorts it. . . (P., I, 225)

In the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge" such terms as "collected dim version" and "gnarled division" (para. 11 & 12) suggest this "halo" or "penumbra" accompanying a definite image.

Anyone who is interested in Stein's vocabulary may well examine her use of such words as "climate," "spread" and "spreading," "door," or "garden." One group of words in "Mabel Dodge" seems to me to refer to the "free water of consciousness," each of which represents a different degree of wetness or fluidity (vagueness and speed?); "water," (para. 3) "irrigation," (para. 7) "inundation," (para. 7) "sprinkling," (para. 11) "dry," (para. 14) "sap," (para. 14) and "paste." (para. 14) In the general context of the stream of consciousness, these terms suggest different degrees of mental spontaneity, which would be minimal in "paste," lively in "sap," scattered in "sprinkling," moving in habitual channels in "irrigation" and overflowing in "inundation."

One sentence in the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge" seems to me to reveal most clearly Stein's deliberate exploration of the borderline between spontaneity and automatism in quest of originality: "There is the use of the stone and there is the place of the stuff and there is the practice of expending questioning." (para. 23) In

emphasizing the uniqueness of every individual's stream of consciousness, James said:

The mind. . . works on the data it receives very much as a sculptor works on his block of stone. In a sense the statue stood there from eternity. But there were a thousand different ones beside it, and the sculptor alone is to thank for having extricated this one from the rest. Just as the world of each of us, howsoever different our several views of it may be, all lay embedded in the primordial chaos of sensations, which gave the mere matter to all of us indifferently. (P.I., 288)

(I have often thought that Stein enjoyed the pun involved in "stone-Stein" and made use of it.)

As to Stein's state of consciousness in the composition of "Mabel Dodge" — I see her as Mabel described her, seated in Edwin's study in the night, writing — not automatically — but in the state of mind reflected by what she says of "intention" and "breathing:"

The intention is what if application has that accident results are reappearing. (para. 2)

So much breathing has not the same place when there is that much beginning. So much breathing has not the same place when the ending is lessening. So much breathing has the same place and there must not be so much suggestion. There can be there the habit that there is if there is no need of resting. The absence is not alternative. (para. 3)

Is the "Portrait of Mabel Dodge at the Villa Curonia" simultaneously a revelation of Mabel's essential nature, a veiled account of a seduction scene, a record of an episode involving a ghost, and an exploration of the processes of aesthetic perception? I am afraid my detective story remains unsolved. Under any circumstance I believe the solution must be partial: "There is not all of any visit."

#### ABBREVIATIONS

ABT	<i>The Autobiography of Alice B. Toklas</i>
CR	<i>Creative Evolution</i>
EA	<i>Everybody's Autobiography</i>
EE	<i>European Experiences</i> (Vol. II of <i>Intimate Memories</i> )
FFF	<i>The Flowers of Friendship: Letters written to Gertrude Stein</i>
FIA	<i>Four in America</i>
GHA	<i>The Geographical History of America, or The Relation of Human Nature to the Human Mind</i>
GSIP	<i>Gertrude Stein in Pieces</i>
LIA	<i>Lectures in America</i>
M&S	<i>Movers and Shakers</i> (Vol. III of <i>Intimate Memories</i> )
P	<i>Principles of Psychology</i> , (2 Vols.)
STA	<i>Seven Types of Ambiguity</i>
TB	<i>Tender Buttons</i>
SW	<i>Selected Writings of Gertrude Stein</i>
TWO	<i>Two: Gertrude Stein and Her Brother</i>

Allegra Stewart received her Ph.D. at the University of London. She was Professor of English at Butler University for many years. She is the author of *Gertrude Stein and the Present*, Harvard University Press, 1967. This paper was delivered at the Special Session on Gertrude Stein at the annual meeting of the Modern Language Association in Chicago in 1977. Dr. Stewart lives in Indianapolis.

## GATJA H. ROTHE, PORTRAIT OF AN ARTIST

Carole Spearin McCauley

(Summary)

Her professional name is G.H. Rothe. In her forties, she's German by birth. She studied first to be a jeweler. Leaving a complicated family situation, she arrived alone in this country via South America in 1970. As a freelance artist, she now supports herself, an assistant, and a home in California. Several distributors, including Edward Weston Graphics and Original Print Collectors Group, Ltd., have handled her mezzotint prints made from copperplate etchings. Her oil paintings and prints are now exclusive with Hammer Galleries, New York (East Coast) and Atelier Gallery, Carmel, California (West Coast). Among 30 U.S. corporate collectors, Bell Telephone bought one of her drawings for a Manhattan phone book. Royal Doulton (England) commissioned her painting of a firebird and other subjects for reproduction on heritage series of fine china plates. The film *The Exorcist* displays some of her metal sculpture -she did the silver head and the little bronze devil from which the large Assyrian figure was assembled on the movie set.

She has had 50 one-woman shows and many more group shows. Galleries, museums, and private collectors have purchased her work in this country and Europe. She's a meticulous craftswoman with attention to art as drawing, form, technique, the natural human figure set in a surrealistic (but not chilling) landscape.

G.H. Rothe currently lives in Carmel, California. I saw her there recently—six feet off the ground upon a scaffolding, for a well-known restaurant had commissioned her to do a 36' x 24' mural of the Carmel hills on one of its courtyard walls. Having labored for months, she was just completing it.

The following interview occurs in her New York studio.

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"A work of art is a **work**. . .an achievement of order, passionately conceived and passionately carried out. We see human thought and feeling best and clearest by seeing it through something solid that our hands have made." Eudora Welty  
 "I have met brave women exploring the outer edge of human possibility, with no history to guide them, and with a courage to make

themselves vulnerable that I find moving beyond the words to express it." Gloria Steinem

*With sunlight flooding the high windows, Gatja Rothe's studio in lower Manhattan is white on white. White desk at which she draws and paints, white shelf for sketch pads, white wall with posters showing her drawings in German and American shows plus an American portfolio series of her prints, more white walls above the massive press on which she does her own printings of large (3' x 4') copperplate etchings.*

*The range of her professional talents - drawing, painting, etching, goldsmithing, jewelry design - is extraordinary. Other practical abilities include car repair, electrical installation, interior decoration, costume design (she has outfitted a dance troupe).*

*By herself she redid her seven-room New York apartment, including sanding floors and woodwork, refinishing walls, building her own chairs and swinging sofa of chrome, leather, and wood. A fifteen-foot painting, a design of green branches and leaves, radiates around her living room ceiling. It's one of her few reminders of rural life or perhaps the forests of southern Germany that surrounded the house she lived in. "The trees were like big beasts clawing the windows," she remembers. The suburbs are for sleeping. It's the movement of New York and other cities that excites her.*

*She's an active, enthusiastic person, a very human combination of courage and cope-ability with some evident anger when business acquaintances or friends fail her. Her soft voice blends formal, accented English with the latest New York slang. Her first names - Gatja (Russian-Polish) and Helgart (German) - indicate her background and the history through which she has lived. Her last name is pronounced RO-teh.*

*G.H. Rothe arrived alone in this country via South America in 1970. Her talents now earn a living for herself and a teenage son.*

### HOW DOES AN IDEA FOR A PAINTING OR DRAWING COME TO YOU?

An idea comes by itself but not from a vacuum. It can't be fixed through only one painting and may need ten, twenty, fifty or more. It's not a vision; that would imply something beyond reality. Rather an idea comes through my environment and way of living, how I perceive the atmosphere of a city like New York - what is behind and between surfaces. It comes from a process of work, thought, and experience; it's a way of looking around me. An idea is never a separate entity like a star I suddenly see. What finally appears has a long history.





I'm not referring to painting technique now.

FOR ME THE ARRIVAL OF AN IDEA FOR WRITING BRINGS MUCH EXCITEMENT. I'VE FOUND ONE MORE PIECE IN A PUZZLE, ANOTHER WAY TO ATTACK OR DEAL WITH A SUBJECT.

Not for me. Because I'm a painter and begin work with a brush or pencil on canvas or paper, it may look to an outsider as if the idea has arrived from nowhere but not to someone involved.

### What to Paint

Ms. Rothe is fascinated with the power of transparency and glass to reveal reality or truth. She keeps small bell jars in her studio. Contrast her work with Sylvia Plath's novel, *The Bell Jar*. Sylvia Plath's jar was a metaphor for suffocation, the solitude of mental illness that clamped and isolated her heroine, first inside her own head, then in a sanatorium. Ms. Rothe's glass, however, reveals human beings in a surrealistic, but not horrifying, landscape of delicately drawn pinks, lavenders, blues. Compared with Plath, she's probably an optimist about the power of art to affect and change people by revealing them to themselves.

Of her paintings (for which she grinds pigments herself), John Faulkner of *Art News* noted "translucence and warmth which causes her images to glow from within."

YOUR PAINTINGS AND SOME OF YOUR PRINTS SHOW PEOPLE INSIDE GLASS BELL JARS OR WALKING BETWEEN THEM. WHEN DID YOU BEGIN EXPERIMENTING WITH THE BELL JAR IDEA?

Long years ago, when I was a child.

GLASS FASCINATED YOU? OR PEOPLE NOT COMMUNICATING WITH ONE ANOTHER FASCINATED YOU?

Well, there are instants of communication, but doesn't everybody ultimately want to live his or her own life, make her own choices? . . .

Transparency fascinated me in the way I discovered it. It opens people to themselves, indicates prejudices. If you really examine my work, I paint glass and its contents but also make the contents themselves transparent. In painter's language, glass is the see-through-est thing I can paint.

YOU MEAN PEOPLE'S BODIES BECOME TRANSPARENT. YOU GET INSIDE, SEE WHAT'S THERE.

I wouldn't go that far. I don't attempt to envision **everybody's** inside. That would claim total success at what many others also attempt? For me it remains a goal, a process.

### How to Paint

Gatja Rothe is a meticulous craftswoman with care for painting and drawing as concept, discipline, perfection of technique. Although self expression and impulse are important to her, they are secondary.

DO YOU ALLOW FOR ACCIDENT IN YOUR WORK?

No! I consider accident as failure in concentration. As you know, I need weeks for one of my paintings. But if I must paint more quickly in order to finish something, one of my work sessions can last 24 hours or more. Concentration during **all** that time is impossible so accidents can happen - but rarely. They happen more often when I'm disturbed by something or somebody.

THEN PARTS OF YOUR CANVASES NEVER GET OUT OF CONTROL, DEMAND OTHER COLORS OR LINES THAT DEVIATE FROM YOUR ORIGINAL PLAN.

No. I know techniques of painting to prevent that. Technique is the painter's language. When he or she has mastered that, then she can begin to speak. It looks easy to handle a brush, but perfection of technique requires thousands of attempts. If a painter knows technique, no accident should happen.

THEN THE SUBJECT MATTER ITSELF NEVER PULLS AGAINST YOUR ORIGINAL PLAN. OR TECHNIQUE GIVES YOU THE MASTERY THAT ALLOWS YOU TO CONTROL THE SUBJECT MATTER.

Of course. But there are many ways to handle a given subject matter. For example, the "action painters" achieve so much life through letting their impulses direct the brush or the paint. Yet their method is exactly opposite to mine because my impetus is mental or spiritual. Yet both approaches accomplish the same end, what painting has always tried to do - **to make life visible!**

### Painting Is Work

Willa Cather once wrote that an artist, like other humans, has a social function to perform, that if you achieve anything noble or enduring, it must be by giving yourself absolutely to your material. This gift of sympathy is your "great gift, the fine thing that alone can make your work fine."

YOUR SKILL AND KNOWLEDGE OF DRAWING AND DESIGN ARE CERTAINLY EVIDENT IN THE PAINTINGS. . . WHAT IS YOUR WORK SCHEDULE?

I paint at least twelve hours a day - or night. To relax I turn to another kind of work. If I sit down and begin to paint, after some hours I'm "in it". Then comes a period, after six or seven



hours, when I'm in something like a trance. This happens with whatever work I do but especially with creative work. It takes an unbelievable amount of discipline to reach that point, but once you've experienced it, you can do without everything and everybody.

For me this is the ideal way to live.

#### IN A WAY YOU BECOME A PURE SPIRIT WITHOUT A BODY TO MAKE DEMANDS.

Yes. At least its demands are not primary. I see myself as a tool for what I do. Therefore I've arranged my life in order to accomplish my work.

#### DO DREAMS, DAYDREAMS, OR FANTASIES AFFECT YOUR WORK?

Everything does. . . But my paintings are not dreams. They're real, not fantastic. The human bodies, their faces, skin and veins, the glass - aren't they visible? Aren't they real?

#### I MEANT "DAYDREAM" IN THE SENSE OF WHETHER YOU HAVE A COMPLETE VISION OF A PAINTING IN MIND BEFORE YOU EVER SET BRUSH TO CANVAS.

Certainly. The whole painting is already complete in my mind. To turn this image into a reality requires plenty of patience and discipline.

Many years ago when I began drawing, I tried to illustrate my night dreams. No more. My night dreams are just mirrors of what I do. That's become more important than the dreams.

#### IS YOUR WORK LIFE CONTINUOUS OR SEGMENTED? DOES YOUR ENERGY COME MORE FROM ONE ONGOING CREATIVE PROCESS OR FROM SPECIFIC MOMENTS OF INTUITION OR INSIGHT THAT CAN RADICALLY ALTER WHAT YOU DO?

My work life is continuous.

#### HOW DO YOU CHOOSE A SPECIFIC MEDIUM TO WORK IN? A DRAWING OR COPPERPLATE ETCHING INSTEAD OF A PAINTING, FOR INSTANCE?

There are many techniques, but I know through my own way of using color and design when something should be said in a painting rather than a drawing. Sometimes I want to say it in both.

*Gatja Rothe has embarked upon a series of limited editions of ballet dancer prints done painstakingly from copperplates via the seventeenth century mezzotint process. Briefly, this involves preparing the plate's surface by roughening it, covering it with tiny depressions or pits by repeatedly "rocking" a toothed steel tool vertically, horizontally, diagonally. She also uses a roller ("roulette") mounted on a handle to achieve the same effect. This roughened surface, the*

*"burr," is what holds the ink, provides the darkly velvet background texture.*

*The next operation engraves the image lines onto the plate by burnishing away the roughened parts with a specially shaped chisel ("burin") or a steel needle.*

*The smoother the area burnished, the less ink it will hold. If returned to original smoothness, it will hold none at all. The artist thus gains a full range of tints from black (or darkest ink) to white. Mezzotint brings light out of darkness. Unlike aquatint, the process uses no acid - only handwork - to etch the plate.*

*The third operation is inking, done by applying colors - brown, red, green, blue, or black - with pieces of cardboard. Gatja Rothe then works the color into the plate with the side of her hand to achieve the exact amount in different areas. Each inking may take 45 minutes and must be repeated, print by print, on damp paper until the run through her press is complete. The 4-of-100-each edition of her *Dance* portfolio required over 400 hours merely for inking and printing.*

*She comments: "Mezzotint technique is so direct, and being a jeweler, I have always had a special relationship with metal. Perhaps I like it because it is so difficult."*

*Such technical concentration does not, however, produce anything that resembles "machine art". Two different critics have noted her "sensual, often erotic" mezzotint images, how in her work "Independent figures interpenetrate a single fantasy space of visionary architecture in which all pulses with high voltage eroticism." The Museum of Erotic Art, Toronto, has collected one of her pen and ink drawings.*

*Besides celebrating the human form in dance, her subject matter includes pastoral scenes, horses, flowers, shells, urban landscapes.*

#### Getting Started

#### WERE YOU ENCOURAGED AS A YOUNG ARTIST? IF SO, BY WHOM?

I'd like to say "by nobody," but that's not true. Well, I wasn't encouraged because it wasn't usual that anybody in Germany or in my family listened to a girl when she said she wanted to be an artist. At first it was impossible for me, and I even had to learn another profession, jewelry making, because that was my father's will.

I have four brothers; we're all jewelers. My father educated us with so much love and motivated us always toward jewelry. Because this love was so strong, I never dared say I wanted something else. But finally I felt it necessary to leave my parents. I took a job in a factory that mass produced jewelry. Then I discovered I didn't have to do jewelry of any kind any more.

Finally I enrolled in a painting class where other

young people were doing what I yearned to do. For the first time I saw that fine art wasn't a weird activity. I was not surrounded by people who considered themselves painters, who **enjoyed** painting.

*Ms. Rothe was born in Beuthen, a town on the East German-Polish border. Because of World War II she attended a variety of schools, ten in all. She was eleven in 1946 when her family reached West Germany. After secondary school (gymnasium) in Rheda, she completed her apprenticeship in jewelry making and studied painting, sculpture, and art history at the Technische Hochschule (Pforzheim). Through adult education courses she continued language study (Latin, French, Italian, Spanish).*

#### YOU BEGAN DRAWING AS A CHILD?

Yes. Since I was six or seven, I've drawn. But my father used my talent for everything he could get from it as jewelry design for customers. As long as I remember, I was drawing for my father or doing things to please him.

#### WHEN DID YOU BEGIN PAINTING?

When I was fourteen, I tried to imitate the techniques of the paintings that hung on the walls of my parents' home. I dipped a brush into salad oil.

#### WAS THAT BECAUSE NOBODY WOULD BUY PAINTS FOR YOU?

Yes, and nobody would tell me how to use them. I tried hard to contact painters, but everybody said painting is very difficult, don't do it. Even when I spoke with painters and sculptors, they didn't take me seriously. They wanted both to use me as a nude model and to seduce me - instead of telling me how to become an artist. If you can believe this, I was 21 before I knew there were schools where a person could learn how to paint.

#### THEY DIDN'T TAKE YOU SERIOUSLY BECAUSE YOU WERE YOUNG OR BECAUSE YOU WERE A GIRL?

Both.

*Many years later one art dealer even refused to believe she had created the mezzotint he was looking at. "Who is the artist?" he bellowed. "This mezzotint must come from Europe."*

*"I am the artist!" she answered.*

*"Then let me see your hands," he demanded. Seeing her toughened skin - inks embedded in the pores - he shook his head. Then he asked, "Woman, why do you work so hard?"*

#### What Do Schools Teach?

#### WHAT OTHER ARTISTS HAVE INFLUENCED YOUR WORK?

Every artist is influenced first by his teacher. When I was twenty-one, I quit jewelry design and entered a painting class. I saw how marvelously other students could paint. They profited from the teacher's direction, but I wound up just trying to please him, which was against my personality. Because he didn't seem to value my work, I felt I didn't interest him as a student. I always felt inferior compared to the others. Therefore, I was very pleased to discover I did interest him as a woman. He and I married. (She married Professor Curd Rothe, a German artist who died in 1973.) I loved him, was excited to experience life with someone from whom I could get what I needed to know about painting.

The question was no longer, "Am I or am I not a painter?" as it had been with my father. It became, "What kind of painter-to-be am I?" And here my painting teacher-husband finally couldn't help me further. I had to follow my own way.

#### THEN DID FORMAL SCHOOLING HELP OR HINDER?

Every school I attended hindered me, was horrible, went so against my personality. In **gymnasium** I always felt like a dirty black sheep in the corner because I just couldn't do as others did. I'd be very afraid to teach because I know how hard it was to be taught and how dangerous it is to educate youngsters in a way that doesn't respect their personalities.

#### BEING IN CLASS MEANS YOU TRY TO PLEASE SOMEBODY ELSE, THE TEACHER, INSTEAD OF DISCOVERING WHAT YOU CAN DO.

Yes. In order to get a good grade, you must please. That was my whole childhood. I would call it a defensive way that becomes later an offensive. When you react against such desperate efforts to please, you naturally make enemies of people who were friends.

#### DO YOU FIND ART CLASSES IN THIS COUNTRY BETTER OR FREER?

Both. The Art Students League was much better because it costs much more money than classes in Germany. It's too **expensive** for American art students to sit around doing nothing, so most of them work terribly hard to learn.

#### HOW DO PERSONAL TENSIONS OR MOODS AFFECT YOUR WORK? FOR INSTANCE, HOW DO YOU MEET DISCOURAGEMENT OR DEPRESSION?

My work always helps me out of depression, out of everything.



MOODS NEVER OVERWHELM YOU SO THAT YOU CAN'T WORK?

No. I work constantly.

HOW DO YOU EVALUATE YOUR OWN WORK OR PROGRESS?

Every artist tends to think the latest painting is his or her best. I wouldn't say that. However, I feel a slow growth. I feel it has taken me these five years to master mezzotint technique. If I don't like something I've done, it's because what I wanted to say has not come clear enough. My concentration has failed. I know my best work is clear enough that everybody can grasp it.

THEN WHAT YOU WANT PEOPLE TO GET IS A MESSAGE AND NOT A WHOLE VISUAL EXPERIENCE?

Yes. I intend a message, a visual message, because words are not sufficient. Or colors are my words.

DO YOU FEEL PRESSURED BY OTHER ARTISTS' WORK?

If they're at my level in technique or subject matter, of course.

HAVE YOU MET MANY WHO WERE?

No. But that's because I don't care to meet them anymore. I've lived with my son here in New York. It's not so easy to find me, and I don't like discussing art with other artists. I've gotten

sensitive about time, and working is always more fruitful than talking about it.

DO YOU NEED OTHER PEOPLE?

No. I don't need anybody for my work.

However, some of my earlier painting was encouraged by Professor Max Bense, German philosopher and author at the University of Stuttgart. He saw that my direction and skill lay in drawing, especially human anatomy. One of his books contains a hundred of my pen and ink drawings.

AS A WOMAN, DO YOU FEEL WOMEN ARTISTS HAVE A PARTICULAR WAY OF SEEING OR EXPRESSING THE WORLD AROUND THEM?

What's finally important is not the artist's sex or personality. It's the work. There should be no difference in quality between work done by a woman or by a man. Talent and intelligence count more.

YOU DON'T AGREE WITH THE GROUP IN WOMEN'S LIBERATION WHO FEEL WOMEN ARTISTS PREFER SPECIAL SUBJECT MATTER THAT THEY'VE BEEN PREVENTED FROM EXPRESSING?

No. My work must be judged in relation to all artists, not only to women. However, men **do** dominate the art world because raising children still takes so much of women's (including women



*Visit in a Humanistic Garden, oil painting G.H. Rothe*

artists') time and energy.

#### HOW DO YOU MANAGE TO COMBINE SO MANY CREATIVE SKILLS?

If a person is creative, he or she should be so in many ways. I find it not unusual that I paint my apartment, build furniture, sew dresses, or repair cars.

#### BUT WHERE DID YOU GET THE CON- FIDENCE TO ATTEMPT ALL THIS IF YOU WERE STEPPED ON AS A CHILD?

I fix things because they're broken! . . . And if somebody says to me, "you can't," that makes me doubly determined. That's my way of learning. You need courage to live as an artist, especially as a woman artist.

*In 1968 G. H. Rothe received the Villa Romana Prize, financing a year's work in Florence, Italy, where she completed huge drawings of the human body at the Museum of Anatomy.*

*Recently she has exhibited at art fairs in Switzerland, Germany, and England. Her work is in the permanent collections of Bibliotheque Nationale, Paris; Museum of Dusseldorf (80 original pencil drawings); Bonn House of Parliament, West Germany; other museum and private collections. Over 30 corporations have purchased her work, and she has designed murals for the German cities of Giessen and Pforzheim.*

*In the U.S. Gatta Rothe's work appears regularly in gallery shows and art magazines. In reviewing her major 1978 show at Hammer Galleries, New York, John Faulkner called her "an artist of singular determination and character" who has made "a unique contribution to the art world."*

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Footnotes cont. from pg. 8

<sup>4</sup>Ibid., 480.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., 498-502.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., 527.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 530.

<sup>8</sup>"Portrait of Constance Fletcher" in *Geography and Plays* (Boston: The Four Seas Company, 1922), 159.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., 161.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., 165.

<sup>11</sup>*Selected Writings*, 509.

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*Doris T. Wight lives in Baraboo, Wisconsin. She was born in Harvey, Illinois, and graduated from Thornton Community College. She writes "I am especially delighted to be published in the area where many of my relatives, including my 86 year old mother (now living in Homewood) reside, and which will always be 'home' to me."*



## THE SOCIAL BIFURCATION OF THE FEMININE

Eveline Lang

Throughout recorded history, one finds women's space split into two categories, each carrying negative valence: woman as mother/wife versus woman as mistress/temptress/witch. As mother/wife she is predicated as a passive, enduring, submissive servant whose main function is that of bearing children and caring for her husband. As mistress she provides sensual pleasure to the male. Her evil traits emerge on either pole: woman's role as temptress implies her deceitful and rapacious nature, while in her subordinate position as wife and mother she is prone to rebel against the dominance of her husband. In either case the female posits a threat to male supremacy and is seen as a disruptive force within the patriarchal order.

Semiotics provides a scheme by which the bifurcation of the feminine in the morphologies of different civilizations can be interpreted. This article will (1) depict the diachronic shifts of sign systems which brought about fundamental transformations in the deployment of the cosmos and (2) discuss the functions and interrelationships of signs in the reconstructed cosmos with regard to the space the female occupies in it. Additionally, semiotics, dealing exclusively with the deployment of signs and their interrelations within different cosmologies, equally discusses the myths of the "Mother Goddess," the "Holy Woman" or the "primal androgyne" as an arrangement of signs arising within a specific world context.

### From mythic to rational cosmos<sup>1</sup>

The alignment of the feminine with the negative poles of the evil, the dark, the weak and the passive can be understood as rooted in the shift from an oral to a graphic tradition, or from a mythic to a rational cosmos within the different civilizations. The deconstruction of the mythical cosmos was a diachronic process which manifested itself as a new composition of the cosmos. What emerged with the graphic tradition was a new synchronic system of first line signs, i.e., signs which deploy a world context, in which the rhythmic interpenetration of the polarities of sky and earth, light and dark was displaced by polar opposites. Up and down were reconstituted as mutually exclusive poles. Along with the new deployment of the first line signs occurred a shift of the second line signs, or those signs which interrelate phenomena within the cosmos constituted by the first line signs: good

and evil, holy and demonic, masculine and feminine. Within the mystic tradition, the polarities were deployed as a cyclical, every-recurring movement. Male and female were not polar opposites but androgynous. In Chinese mythology, for example, the cosmic movement was described as cyclical, yang and yin being intertwined as cosmic forces. Yang and yin developed out of the Tao and the *T'ai-chi*, the great ridge pole, the supreme ultimate.<sup>2</sup> All people were said to be composed of both yang and yin as two vital inseparable components. Yang, the masculine, aggressive pole which inhabited light, spring and summer was intertwined with yin, the feminine, passive, dark pole which carried fall and winter. Yang and yin were manifested in the Great Original, the holy woman *T'ai Yuan*, an androgyne.<sup>3</sup> A primal androgyne is also found in the myths of the Tantric religious sect of both the Tibetan Buddhists and the Indian Hindus. In Tibetan Buddhism, the male-female polarities were called *yabyum*, in Hinduism they were Shiva and Shakti.<sup>4</sup>

In the rationally deployed cosmos, the polarities became mutually exclusive categories, surrounded by impenetrable boundaries. High/low, light/dark, good/evil were deployed along a vertical axis which posited the higher regions as more perfect than the lower regions. The higher domain now ruled over the lower sphere. Time within the new cosmology was no longer cyclical and repetitive, but was constituted as progressing in linear sequence — from past to future, from left to right, from darkness to light, from fallen to saved, from irrational to rational.<sup>5</sup> The resultant dualistic positioning of mind over matter was directly associated with the male-female dichotomy: according to one source, "mind" and "man" both stem from *menis*, which means "anger" in the sense of ruling force, while matter stems from the root "ma," which is also the stem for mother.<sup>6</sup> Man-mind, the perfect and stable, rules over mother-matter, the less perfect and dynamic. The female remains on the level of carnality, the negative pole, while the male rises over and above nature to occupy the positive side.

With the reconstruction of the cosmos along an axis of opposite polarities the demonic emerges as a separate region outside the orderly system. Christian mythology offers an account which exemplifies the deployment of the nether region.

The source of the demonic in Christian mythology is portrayed in Lucifer, the "fallen angel," who establishes a counter-order to the "Kingdom of God."<sup>7</sup> The devil sets up an equal-

ly hierarchical anti-order to replace the normative structure created by God. His status is that of a rebel who refuses to remain subservient to God and sets out to establish his own domain of power. Surrounded by his army of demons he resides in the lower atmosphere where he exercises his power of darkness. Satan is the adversary whose sole aim is to tempt humans to sin and to entice them from their faith. His evil doings on earth become manifest in man's break with the standards set by God. It stands in opposition to the good and thus represents a threat to the well-established order. As the *mysterium tremendum* it forbids danger, dissolution and decay, and arouses fear in humans.<sup>7</sup>

The devil, in early Christian mythology, entered into the stable world from the dark nether regions outside to disrupt the natural order by bargaining for human souls. To exercise his evil projects, Satan appeared through various earthly agents by entering into them and acting through them. Humans and animals were described as equally amenable to being possessed by the devil. However, the female in her inherent propensity toward evil was depicted as the most potential medium through which the devil acted out his apocalyptic schemes.

The change from one morphological system to another in different civilizations is depicted in various myths of fall. These accounts of the decomposition of the cosmos establish the relationship between the female and the evil powers of the nether world.

Having been created from a bent rib of Adam's, Eve, according to the Jahvist version of creation and fall, is further removed from God than the male.<sup>9</sup> Her inferior nature makes her more prone to vice, less intelligent and weaker and eventually leads her to temptation. Being tempted first, Eve is portrayed as the greater sinner and thus subject to punishment in two ways: biologically, in that she has to bear children, and socially, in that she is subject to the man. Her evil nature is made explicit in various Pauline epistles of the New Testament in which she is identified as the seductress of man whose evil designs are intended to defer man from the good. This theme is particularly emphasized in the Proverbs and in Ecclesiastes<sup>10</sup> and further elaborated by the clergy in the Middle Ages:

What is woman? Hurtful friendship; inescapable punishment; necessary evil; natural temptation; desirable calamity; domestic danger, delightful injury; born an evil, painted with good color; gate of the devil; road to iniquity. . . . From the beginning sin was taken from thee.<sup>11</sup>

The Jahvist account of the creation emerged as a central myth in the Puritan tradition of the six-

teenth and seventeenth centuries. Milton's version of the Fall in *Paradise Lost* stresses Eve's inferiority on account of her having been formed in the image of man, not God. Christ's answer to Adam who pleads for extenuation after having been tempted by Eve makes explicit the authority Adam was meant to maintain over her.

. . . was shee made thy guide,  
Superior, or but equal, that to her  
Thou did'st resigne thy Manhood, and the Place  
Wherein God set thee above her made of thee,  
And for thee, whose perfection farr excell'd  
Hers in all real dignitie: Adorned  
She was indeed, and lovely to attract  
Thy Love, not thy Subjection, and her Gifts  
Were such as under Government well seem'd  
Unseemly to bear rule, which was thy part  
And person, had'st thou known thy self aright.<sup>12</sup>

In all of Milton's major poems--*Paradise Lost*, *Samson Agonistes* and *Paradise Regained*--one encounters the woman as ruinous to the male, both in her position as wife and as mistress. The Chorus in *Samson Agonistes* characterizes woman's life:

Is it for that such outward ornament  
Was lavish't on thir Sex, that inward gifts  
Were left for hast unfinish't, judgment scant,  
Capacity not rais'd to apprehend  
Or value what is best  
In choice, but ofttest to affect the wrong?  
Or was too much of self-love mixt,  
Of constancy not root infix'd,  
That either they love nothing, or not long?  
What e'er it be, to wisest men and best,  
Seeming at first all heavenly under virgin veil,  
Soft, modest, meek, demure,  
Once join'd, the contrary she proves, a thorn  
Intestine, far within defensive arms  
A cleaving mischief, in his way to virtue  
Adverse and turbulent, or by her charms  
Draws him awry, enslav'd  
With dotage, and his sense deprav'd  
To folly and shameful deeds which ruin ends.  
What Pilot so expert but needs must wreck  
Embarqu'd with such a Stears-mate at the Helm?<sup>13</sup>

The seductive power of the female is further stressed in *Paradise Regained*, in which Belial, one of Satan's followers, advises Satan to tempt Christ with beautiful women. The female is thus presumed to be inclined by nature to be at the service of the devil, who finds in her an instrument for leading man into sin:

Expert in amorous Art, enchanting tongues  
Perswasive, Virgin majesty with mild  
And sweet allay'd, yet terrible to approach,  
Skill'd to retire, and in retiring draw  
Hearts after them tangl'd in Amorous Nets.  
Such object hath the power to soft'n and tame  
Severest temper, smooth the rugged'st brow,  
Enerve, and with voluptuous hope dissolve,



Draw out with credulous desire, and lead  
At will the manliest, resolute brest,  
As the Magnetic hardest Iron draws:  
Women, when nothing else, beguil'd the heart  
Of wisest Solomon, and made him build,  
And made him bow to the Gods of his Wives.<sup>14</sup>

The myth of the Fall as told by Jahvist bears close resemblance to Hesiod's account of the myth surrounding Pandora, the first woman. While in earlier myths she appeared as the Great Goddess, the all-giving who ruled over gods and men, in Hesiod's version she brought evil and suffering onto man. Unable to tame her curiosity she opened the jar and released swarms of evils;

For Zeus in anger concealed the food of man  
Because devious Prometheus had tricked him.  
Therefore he devised sorrow and trouble for men.  
He his fire. But that same good son of Iapetus  
Stole it again for men, from the Lord of Counsel,  
In a hollow fennel stalk, without the god's  
knowledge.  
Then in anger Cloud-herding Zeus said to him,  
"Son of Iapetus, cleverer than all other men,  
You rejoin at having purloined fire deceitfully,  
But it shall cause great sorrow to you and future  
generations.  
For instead of fire I shall give them something evil  
which they shall greatly delight in, embracing their  
own ruin.  
So that Father of Men and Gods spoke and laugh-  
ed loudly.  
Then he told Hephaistus, the Master Smith, to  
mix together  
Water and earth and then to put into the mixture  
Human speech and strength in order to create  
A girl, lovely as any of the immortal goddesses.  
He told Athene to teach the creature to weave  
And embroider and he ordered the goddess  
Aphrodite  
To endow her face with charm and sensual appeal  
Which causes black corrupting passion,  
And Hermes, the Messenger and Argos-killer,  
Was told to give the thing the mind of a bitch  
And a thievish nature. So he spoke and the gods  
listened.  
At once the Limping God made the image  
Of a modest girl from earth as the Son of Kronos  
ordered.  
Then grey-eyed Athene clothed her and gave her a  
girdle  
And the goddess, Persuasion, and the Graces hung  
her  
with golden chains and the bright-haired Hours  
crowned her with spring flowers.  
Pallas Athene bestowed many colored ornaments  
And the Messenger, Argos-killer, placed in her  
breast  
A talent for lying speech and a thievish disposi-  
tion.  
He did as Zeus, the Thundered, ordered and gave  
her speech.  
Then the Herald of the Gods named the woman

Pandora, for all the Olympians had given her gifts  
To be the ruin of men who work for a living.  
Now when this deadly, unescapable snare was  
made,  
The Father sent the swift messenger and Argos-  
killer  
To Epimetheus with the gift. But Epimetheus  
never heeded  
The advice of Prometheus never to accept a gift  
From Olympian Zeus, but to send it back  
For fear it might bring evil to mankind.  
But instead he took her and learned of the evil  
later.  
For in former times men lived upon the earth  
With minds free from evil, rough work, and pain  
Which the Fates bestow (for in evil times  
Men grow old very quickly). But the woman  
Lifted the great lid of the jar with her hands,  
She let forth gloomy afflictions to give men pain;  
Only hope remained beneath the rim of the jar  
For the lid was put back before it could escape.  
This was the will of the Lord of Counsel,  
Herder of the Clouds. But still ten thousand  
Sorrows fly about, the ruin of mankind.  
For both the earth and the sea are filled with  
evil.<sup>15</sup>

Pandora carries the traits that the feminine pole was ascribed in the newly deployed cosmos: her being identified as a beauty and seductress, on the one hand, and endowed with domestic skills on the other hand, reflects the dichotomous nature the female assumed. She is alluring yet unintelligent, provides sensual pleasure to the male world but her rightful place is in the home where she is supposed to be the giver and the caretaker of her husband. Both qualities, however, eventually converge in her evil inclinations: her passion corrupts, she is deceitful and thievish, and her gifts turn out to be the doom for mankind. The male is condemned to suffering; the woman is the root of all evil.

As indicated above, the theme remained basically the same in the Jahvist creation myth. Hebrew mythology provides an alternative account of creation and fall. According to Zohar, the first woman was Lilith, a primal androgyne.<sup>16</sup> She was created of one substance with Adam, but later God is said to have separated them and Lilith became Adam's first wife. However, she rebelled against her inferior position and fled. When she refused to return, God created Eve out of Adam's rib, thus affirming her subordinate status. Jealous of Adam's new wife, Lilith became a demon who haunted the night and killed infants. The name Lilith is etymologically related to the Hebrew word for night and Lilith came to be called the "daughter of darkness," symbolic of the dark, evil side of the woman. One Christian tradition even identified Lilith with the serpent who seduced Eve. The legend of Lilith carries another theme

which depicts the view of the feminine: her propensity toward jealousy and revenge against other women. She competes for admiration and attention by the male and, if denied, she elaborates wicked designs to punish her female rival. Cinderella, Snow White, Sleeping Beauty and Rapunzel all became victims of the revengeful nature of their jealous step-mothers or step-sisters. The woman in positions of power relative to other females is portrayed as carrying out cruel designs which are detrimental to her subordinates.

Progression of thought in this direction leads to pronouncements of "woman as witch":

. . . that she is more perilous than a snare does not speak of the snare of hunters, but of devils. For men are caught not only through their carnal desires, when they see and hear women: for S. Bernard says: Their face is a burning wind, and their voice the hissing of serpents. . . And when it is said that her heart is a net, it speaks of the inscrutable malice which reigns in their hearts. . .

To conclude: All witchcraft comes from carnal lust, which is in women insatiable. See Proverbs xxx: there are three things that are never satisfied, yea, a fourth thing which says that, it is enough; that is, the mouth of the womb.<sup>17</sup>

This passage appeared in the *Malleus Maleficarum* (the 'Hammer of Wickedness'), a document written by two inquisitors of the Dominican Order who were appointed by Pope Innocent VIII in 1484 to specify the crime of witchcraft. In the late Middle Ages, rejection of carnal lust as sin and as a threat to salvation found expression in recourse to extreme asceticism. Ascetic principles were reinforced by increasing dispersion of the belief in witchcraft, which was formally recognized by the church in 1484. It defined witchcraft as a confederacy with the devil, or entering a personal relationship with the devil by means of a compact.<sup>18</sup> In assemblies called the Witches' Sabbat (from French 's'ebatre,' meaning to be gay, to frolic), witches were said to copulate with the devil. A witch was further identified as either *possessed* by the demon, in which case the individual had no control over the evil force and was thus absorbed into the demonic, or the witch was *obsessed* in the sense of being accentuated.<sup>19</sup> The female, being viewed as weak and passive by nature and as tending toward the evil, became described as more likely to be besieged by the devil than the male:

But the natural reason is that she is more carnal than a man, as is clear from her many carnal abominations. And it should be noted that there was a defect in the formation of the first woman, since she was formed from a bent rib, that is, rib of the breast, which is bent as it were in a contrary direction to a man. And since through this defect she is an imperfect animal, she always

deceives. . . And all this is indicated by the etymology of the word; *Femina* comes from *Fe* and *Minus* since she is ever weaker to hold and preserve the Faith. And this as regards faith is of her very nature. . .<sup>20</sup>

Men were held to be protected from the influence of Satanic power because Christ had died "to preserve the male sex from so great a crime: since He was willing to be born and die for us, therefore He has granted men this privilege."<sup>21</sup>

Witches defied the principles of the rational cosmic order. They performed levitations, were flying through the air and had the power to render the masculine impotent. They were untouched by the dictates of the phallocratic rule structure by asserting for themselves a space that the new cosmology firmly denied them. They were moving toward the irrational, the unpredictable and ever dynamic, thus violating the natural laws of the misogynistic cosmos. The portrait of the evil woman is also found in the caricature of the old maids. Daniel Defoe, for example, referred to them as "a Furious and Voracious kind of Females; nay, even a kind of Amazonian Cannibals, that not only had Subdued, but Devoured those that had the Misfortune to fall into their Hands . . . If an OLD-MAID should bite any body, it would certainly be as Mortal, as the Bite of a Mad-Dog."<sup>22</sup>

Fear of women and hostility toward them arches over into the twentieth century literature. Faulkner characterizes the female as mindless and heartless, yet all-powerful. The male cannot resist being sexually involved with her despite the fact that she is dangerous. Even if he attacks her first, she will emerge as the triumphant force because of her invulnerability and her insensitive carnal instinct. The traditional female is described as subhuman and deficient, while the emancipated woman is viewed as corrupt and dangerous.<sup>23</sup>

To ward off the manifestations of evil from the orderly universe, the phallocratic system dictated measures which were inherent in the dichotomous deployment of the cosmos. The body as the vessel for evil spirits, primarily the female body which signified carnality, had to be subjected to torture if the demon was to be exorcised. Corporeal punishment in the form of annihilation of the possessed corpus was exercised through the burning of witches.

In China, the practice of footbinding was a means of constraining woman's space and corporeal engagement to the extent that she was virtually immobilized.<sup>24</sup> Mind/*menis* as the righteous ruler over matter was justified in preserving the cosmic order by any means possible.



The destruction of the evil woman is a theme that can be found throughout ancient mythologies. Vishnu beheads the mother of the guru of the demons, the evil mother in Mahayana Buddhism; the Reg-Veda depicts Indra as having done a heroic deed by slaying Dawn, the woman who intended to do evil.<sup>25</sup> The figures of Urvasi, Saranyu and Yami in the Reg-Veda, whose common origin is a goddess of earlier Indo-European myths, are never worshipped. They are dangerous, immoral and cruel and pose a haunting threat to the man.<sup>26</sup> Only through their death can order be established.

A less cruel but nevertheless effective way of "putting the female in the right place" is shown in the shrew-taming plays of the Middle Ages and those written at the end of the sixteenth century. The plot evolves the character of a disobedient wife who, after having been justly reprimanded by the male, submits resentfully to his commands:

Then to His image did He make a man.  
Old Adam, and from his side asleep  
A rib was taken, of which the Lord did make  
The woe of man, so termed by Adam them  
"Wo-man," for that by her came sin to us;  
And for her sin was Adam doomed to die.  
Obey them, love them, keep, and nourish them,  
If they by any means do want our helps;  
Laying our hands under their feet to tread,  
If that by that we might procure their ease;  
And for a precedent I'll first begin  
And lay my hand under my husband's feet.<sup>27</sup>

The woman who adopts masculine ideals, however, will become sexually uncontrollable in her temper and turn to destruction of the male:

The very women who are most busy saving the bodies of men, and saving the children: these women-doctors, these nurses, these educationalists, these public-spirited women, these female saviours: they are all, from the inside, sending out waves of destructive malevolence which eat out the inner life of a man, like a cancer. It is so, it will be so, till we men realize it and react to save ourselves.<sup>28</sup>

Such was D.H. Lawrence's reaction to the new emergence of the emancipation movement in the twentieth century. Women moving toward the masculine pole, demanding equal recognition and access to the active domain, were rejected on the basis of the negative valence their nature carried.

Twentieth century psychology, finally, evolved theories which incorporated the polar cosmological scheme that had been constructed with the onset of the graphic tradition. Jung, in his studies of primitive peoples, for example, depicts his "archetypes" in the following ways: the male psyche is characterized by authority,

logic and order, as that which is saturnian and embodies the consonant values of patriarchy. The female psyche, on the other hand, is emotional, receptive, anarchic and cancerian. While conceding that the male psyche has a female component and vice versa, Jung nevertheless insists that women are ruled by the subconscious, men are ruled by the conscious, or mind.<sup>29</sup>

The prejudgment of woman's inferiority is equally present in Freud's theoretical schemes. Freud identifies woman almost as a purely sexual being, equates femininity with sexuality and "proves" the female's inherent proneness to neurosis. In *Civilization and Its Discontents* he explicitly states his view of women as retarding the development of civilization:

. . . Women soon come into opposition to civilization and display retarding and restraining influence. . . Women represent the interests of the family and of sexual life. The work of civilization has become increasingly the business of men, it confronts them with ever more difficult tasks and compels them to carry out instinctual sublimations of which women are little capable.<sup>30</sup>

The prejudgments upon which these theories were built are not random selections, however. Rather, they are engrained in the scientific enterprise per se, as science is a direct manifestation of the myth of rational cosmos.<sup>31</sup> Science is established through the deployment of second level signs based on the rational cosmological context. "Science. . . is an extension of the man-mind rule, as the 'higher' principle to be achieved through 'historical progress,' and in the future. Science is a dramatization of the conservative movement toward rigidity and maximum 'rule.'"<sup>32</sup>

Historical accounts throughout the ages also display their portraits of the good women. The woman achieves virtue by abandoning her sexuality, her purification comes through the erasure of her feminine traits.

Worship of Virgin Mary, the Holy Mother, arose as a central theme in the church from the beginning of the twelfth century on. The virgin became the symbol of redemption from Eve's sin and mediator between man and God. She was idealized as pure in spirit and body, enabling man to gain salvation.<sup>33</sup> The Madonna represents an ideal that the "daughters of Eve: can never achieve. Her immaculate conception (her own freedom from original sin), and the preservation of her virginity after having born the Son of God, make her cease to be a woman.

Along with the worship of the innocent virgin emerged the idealization of the repentant woman, as exemplified in the image of Magdalen.<sup>34</sup> She is carved out as the kneeling woman, weeping and begging for forgiveness.

She is the one who acknowledges male supremacy and seeks absolution from her evil through deepest submission to the Savior. Realizing the immensity of the sin she committed by disobeying the Father, she knows that she can only be redeemed by accepting pain and suffering. She recognizes that her salvation can only come through the male.

The virtuous woman is again found in the fairy tales mentioned earlier-- Sleeping Beauty, Cinderella, Rapunzel and Snow White are victims at core. Their total inertia makes them ultimately helpless in the face of the wickedness of their female rivals. The acceptance of martyrdom, however, does not remain unrewarded: the prince takes her under his protection, shields her from danger and wants nothing but to preserve her purity by guarding her beauty and innocence as inexhaustible treasures for mankind. She is good as long as she is mute, passive and stationary. Her ultimate containment thus occurs with her death—her purity is rendered eternal. As Andrea Dworkin remarks:

When she is good, she is soon dead. In fact, when she is good, she is so passive in life that death must be only more of the same. . . the only good woman is a dead woman. When she is bad she lives, or when she lives she is bad. She has one real function, motherhood. In that function, because it is active, she is characterized by overwhelming malice, devouring greed, uncontainable avarice. She is ruthless, brutal, ambitious, a danger to children and other living things. Whether called mother, queen, stepmother, or wicked witch, she is the wicked witch, the content of nightmare, the source of terror.<sup>35</sup>

The same context, Mary Daly observes:

Patriarchal society revolves around myths of Processions. Earthly processions both generate and reflect the image of processing from and return to God the Father. According to Christian theology, there are processions within the godhead, which is triune. The Son, who is the second person, is said to proceed from the Father, and the Holy Ghost is said to proceed from the Father and the Son. Moreover, all creatures proceed from this eternally processing God, who is their Last End, with whom the righteous will be united in eternal bliss. . . . (The) ultimate symbol of processions is the all-male Trinity itself.<sup>36</sup>

The procession, whether it occurs in religion or in science, revolved around the masculine pole, which is rational/enlightened/ever progressing. As the all-male trinity infinitely moves within itself, so does the "scientific enterprise." The scientist observes, hypothesizes, theorizes, tests, concludes, observes, hypothesizes, . . . ad infinitum. Progress in science has nothing but progress as its aim, and progress in the rationally deployed cosmos is movement from left to right,

from darkness to light, from irrational to rational. The feminine is excluded from this procession. Science deals with "secondary qualities," it reduced the life world to measurable, quantifiable objects which the *mind* can "objectively" observe. Everything that is dynamic and ambiguous is *ruled out* of its domain because it is located on the opposite negative pole. The feminine as the irrational is disqualified from participating in the search and widening/expanding it to include the ambiguity and dynamism of phenomena. Science thus involves power positioning. It discards the feminine/dynamic/ambiguous as irrational and assumes the power to rule over *matter*, manipulate and control it. Progress in science, which aims at exerting ever more control over its objects of investigation, can thus be seen as further and further invasion of feminine space and claiming absolute rule over it. Mary Daly again finds that:

This mythic paradigm of the Trinity is the product of Christian culture, but it is expressive of *all* patriarchal patterning of society. Indeed, it is the most refined, explicit, and loaded expression of such patterning. Human males are eternally putting on the masks and playing the roles of the Divine Persons. The mundane processions of sons have as their basic but unacknowledged and unattainable aim an attempted 'consubstantiality' with the father (the cosmic father, the oedipal father, the professional godfather). . . . *Patriarchy is itself the prevailing religion of the entire planet*, and its essential message is necrophilia. . . . And the symbolic message of all the sects of the religion which is patriarchy is this: Women are dreaded anomie.<sup>37</sup>

To summarize, then, this essay assesses the designation of the feminine as evil or demonic, which is given in mythologies across civilizations throughout history, through semiological analysis of symbolic configurations. A study of the shift from a mythical to a rational cosmos, that is from an oral to a graphic tradition, reveals the deconstruction of a cosmos deployed as a rhythmical interpenetration of polar regions and the reconstruction of a cosmos of opposite polarities. Cosmic time as non-directed, cyclical movement is displayed by time as unidirectional horizontal movement. With the new deployment of first line signs emerges a reconstitution of second line signs along a vertical axis and a hierarchical arrangement of functions. Male and female in the rational cosmos are no longer constituted as androgynous but as polar opposites, man occupying the rational space, woman the irrational.

The development of the notion of the demonic is illustrated in the discussion of various myths of all, which also revealed the relationship between the feminine and the demonic depicted in the mythological accounts.



The study further points out the dichotomization of women's space — wife/mistress, lily/rose, mother/witch, etc. — which was perpetuated throughout history. The theme of the feminine as evil is discussed through a portrayal of literary accounts and social practices and is contrasted with the image of the ideal woman as described in myths. Finally, science is identified as a domain which excludes feminine/irrational space as it processes within the masculine/rational region. The feminine as evil thus is revealed as inherent in a world context in which the cosmos is deployed in opposite polarities that are arranged into phallic axial significations.

## Footnotes

<sup>1</sup>Algis Mickunas, "World Contexts." Paper presented at the Speech Communication Association Conference, Chicago, Ill., 1984.

<sup>2</sup>Andrea Dworkin, *Woman Hating*. New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1974, p. 165.

<sup>3</sup>Dworkin, *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>4</sup>Dworkin, *Ibid.*, p. 167.

<sup>5</sup>Mickunas, *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>6</sup>Mickunas, *Ibid.*, p. 11.

<sup>7</sup>Mickunas, "The Demonic." Originally published in *Metmenys*, 45, 1983, pp. 80-105, "Demoniskos Akivaizdos." See also, Edward Langdon, *Satan, a Portrait: A Study of the Character of Satan Through All the Ages*. London: Skeffington & Sons, 1945.

<sup>8</sup>James W. Boyd, *Satan and Mara: Christian and Buddhist Symbols of Evil*. Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1975, p. 173.

<sup>9</sup>Boyd, *Ibid.*, p. 150.

<sup>10</sup>H.R. Hays, *The Dangerous Sex: The Myth of Female Evil*. New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1964, Ch. 8.

<sup>11</sup>Katharine Rogers, *The Troublesom Helpmate: A History of Misogyny in Literature*. Seattle and London: University of Washington Press, 1966, Introduction.

<sup>12</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, p. 72.

<sup>13</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, p. 152.

<sup>14</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, p. 156.

<sup>15</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, p. 157.

<sup>16</sup>Hays, *Ibid.*, Ch. 7.

<sup>17</sup>Maximilian Rudwin, *The Devil in Legend and Literature*. New York: AMS Press, 1983, Ch. IX.

<sup>18</sup>Dworkin, *Ibid.*, p. 133; see also; Shulamith Shahar, *The Forth Estate: A History of Women in the Middle Ages*. London & New York: Methuen, 1983, Ch. 8.

<sup>19</sup>Langdon, *Ibid.*, p. 76ff.

<sup>20</sup>Robbins, *The Encyclopedia of Witchcraft and Demonology*. New York: Crown Publishers, 1959, p. 392.

<sup>21</sup>Dworkin, *Ibid.*, p. 132.

<sup>22</sup>Dworkin, *Ibid.*, p. 130.

<sup>23</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, Ch. 3; Hays, *Ibid.*, Ch. 16, 17.

<sup>24</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, p. 202.

<sup>25</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, pp. 252-258.

<sup>26</sup>Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology. The Metaethics of Radical Feminism*. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978, Ch. 4. See also: Dworkin, *Ibid.*, Ch. 6.

<sup>27</sup>Wendy Doniger O'Flaherty, *Women, Androgynes, and Other Mythical Beasts*. Chicago & London: The University of Chicago Press, 1980, p. 71; p. 79.

<sup>28</sup>O'Flaherty, *Ibid.*, p. 79.

<sup>29</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, pp. 91-92.

<sup>30</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, p. 246.

<sup>31</sup>Dworkin, *Ibid.*, p. 159.

<sup>32</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, p. 236.

<sup>33</sup>Mickunas, "World Contexts," p. 13.

<sup>34</sup>Mickunas, *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>35</sup>Denis de Rougemont, *Love in the Western World*. Trans. by Montgomery Beligion, New York: Random House/Pantheon, 1940, pp. 294-296. See also: Rudwin, *Ibid.*, pp. 178-179. Also: Daly, *Ibid.*, pp. 83-88. Ian Maclean, *The Renaissance Notion of Woman*. Cambridge: Cambridge University.

<sup>36</sup>Rogers, *Ibid.*, Ch. 6.

<sup>37</sup>Dworkin, *Ibid.*, p. 41.

<sup>38</sup>Daly, *Ibid.*, p. 37.

<sup>39</sup>Daly, *Ibid.*, pp. 38-39.

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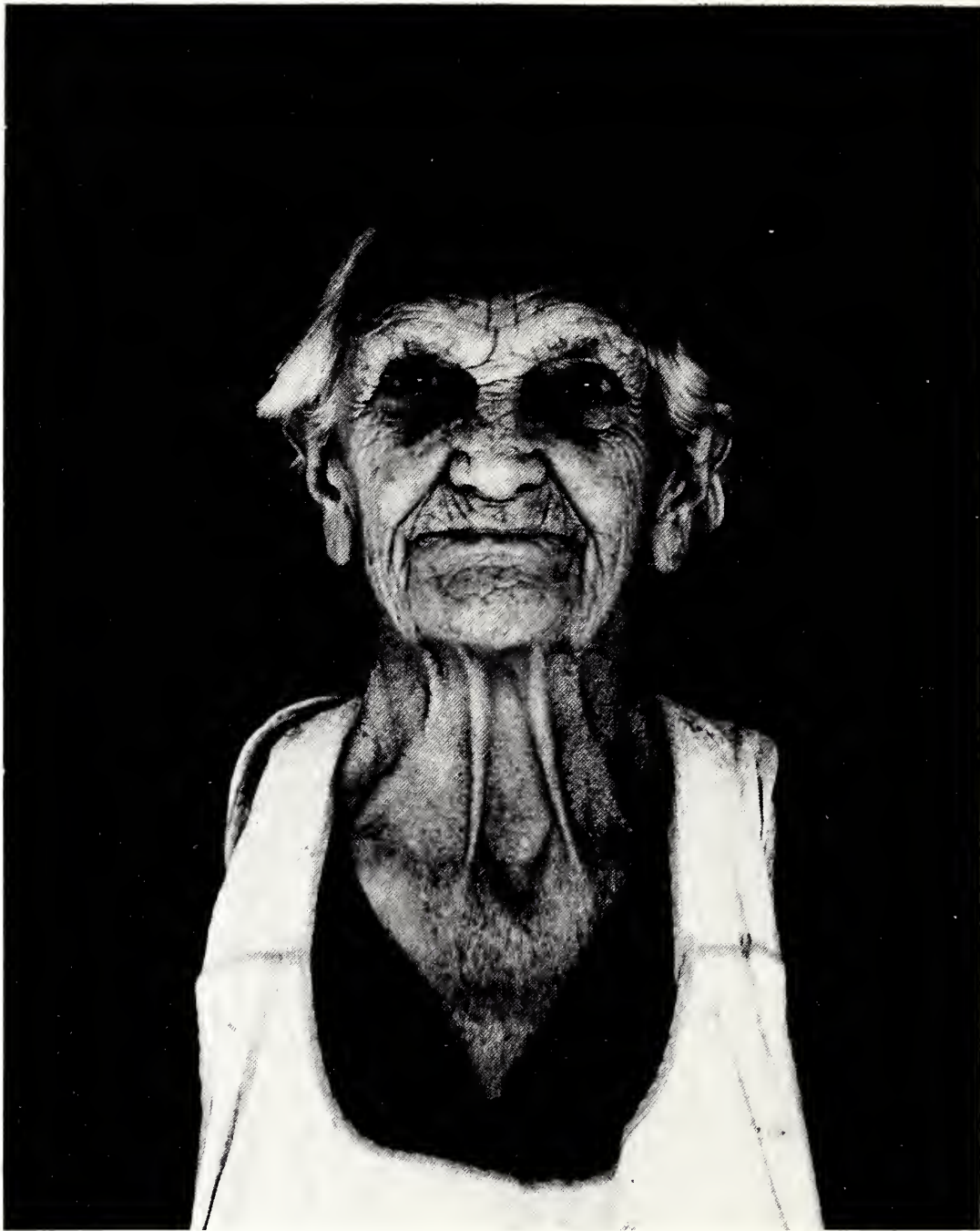
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Photograph, Raymond Bial

## ACCOMMODATION

Joanne Zimmerman

After a long illness, Matt Vidich died, and then the family admitted to their responsibility for his crochety widow.

After the funeral, Cousin Laura put her arm through the old lady's and said, "Why don't you come home with me for a few days?" and was visibly relieved when Mrs. Vidich refused. She

was exhausted with all the hullabaloo of illness, hospital, funeral, and wanted only to return silently to her small quiet house.

Cousin Lottie shook her grey head and said, "You oughtn't be alone, dear. Now if I had room. . ."

Buster Vidich roused himself and said, "I'll come home with you, Mama. I'll stay with you for a while."

"No need. No need at all," Mrs. Vidich said



furiously. "I don't mind being alone. I was alone all the time he was in the hospital, wasn't I?" she accused them all. "I've got the Finleys next door, and the Pagorias through the back." The last person she wanted around was her lumbering clumsy son. She said to him, "Your place is with Marge. I don't want you to leave Marge," playing his own game—noble, self-sacrificing—expecting Marge to be her ally.

But Marge just waved her hand. "Oh, no. It's quite all right, Mother Vidich. I can spare him for a few days."

The corners of Mrs. Vidich's mouth pulled down, her watery blue eyes moved angrily from one to the other. No one took her side. The family attributed her expression to grief. She was thinking nastily, "Probably doesn't want him around any more than I do. She sure don't need him. You bet she don't need him. Married twenty years and not chick nor child. Probably never even had a party." Then she felt better, as though she had gotten even with Marge and Buster.

Everyone was looking at her with such apprehension and tenderness that she wasn't sure she hadn't said the last of this aloud. She worried that Marge would be mad at her, so she acquiesced gruffly. "Well, then," she said to Buster, settling her hat straight on her head. "Let's get going. What are we standing around here for?" It pleased her to see them exchange glances that said, "See? She's all right after all. She's a spunky old gal after all," with relief that they would not have to look out for her, difficult as she was.

When she got home she opened all the windows, went in to the kitchen to fix a bite to eat before everyone came. She noticed that her house plants were drooping, the coleus, violets, begonias, the ivy leaves curled back on themselves, ferns dry as dust. She had forgotten about them in the excitement of the last few days. Now she thought they looked appropriate, drooping, heads down, humbled, they looked sad. They looked the way she ought to, and she approved of them. She gave them each just enough water to keep them alive, but not enough to restore them to vigor.

She put the kettle on for tea and cut a thick slice of bread for herself. Later everyone would descend on her, bringing plenty of food. She was hungry now and would eat, and then eat less later. It would not be seemly to have an appetite the day of the funeral. She did not ask Buster if he wanted anything. "Let him wait. He'll get plenty later." Buster always wanted something. There was no need to ask. If he wanted something, he could get it for himself. It was his

idea to stay with her. She wasn't going to wait on him. She would sit down, eat, and drink her tea. Perhaps she could finish before it occurred to Buster that he was hungry, and she would not have to sit across the table from him and watch him eat. Buster shoveled quantities of food into his big mouth, chewed noisily with his blubbery lips parted, and swallowed audibly. As many times as she had told him. She guessed she had told him every meal every day all the years he was growing up, and it never did any good. Sometimes, right after she scolded him, he would sit up straight, bring the food up to his mouth, and try to chew with his lips closed, but after a few minutes he would be hunched over his plate again, shoveling in whatever was before him, everything mixed up together. She got tired of telling him. She had put up with him for a long time. He didn't marry Marge until he was thirty-seven.

Mrs. Vidich was tired of having Buster around long before he had finished cleaning out Mr. Vidich's belongings. It worried her that there didn't seem any hurry for him to get back to his job. It annoyed her that he did not hanker to return to Marge. She didn't want Marge to get away, not with that good job, and all the money she was making. If he was so nonchalant about Marge, and Marge left him, he might think he ought to come home to live, and she didn't want that, not at all.

Buster interfered with her day and night. Everything she wanted to do, he had something to say. "Now, Ma, don't you think that's too much? Don't you think that's too tiring?" And would try to do it himself, whatever it was, setting the table, washing dishes even, and never did it *her* way, the way she wanted, was used to doing things.

She was used to having Mr. Vidich go to bed early every night. He always fell sound asleep. This gave her the evening free to watch the goings-on at her next-door neighbors, the Finleys. From her diningroom window she could clearly see into their downstairs bedroom, and partly into the livingroom and hall. She would pull a chair to the window in her darkened house and watch the Finley children play and fight. Six children, going on seven, if she wasn't wrong about Mrs. Finley the last time she saw her prepare for bed. She would watch the lights go out in their livingroom, and one by one in the upstairs bedrooms where the children slept, watch Mr. Finley undress, and then Mrs. Finley, watch them fool around with each other or argue. In the summer time, with all the windows open, she could even hear what they were saying. It was better than television because during the day, in the yard, at the grocery store, they

were polite but stand-offish, poor people trying to put on a front for the neighbors, while all the time she knew them as well as they knew each other, having watched them scratch and tease and love each other. She could hardly wait to get back to it.

Buster didn't want to go to bed until she did, sat in the livingroom watching television and yawning. She tried going to bed early, in hopes he would, too, and he did. She waited until she heard him snore, and then got up carefully, slipped into the diningroom, lifted a chair over to the window. The legs of the chair tapped on the floor when she set it down, and the chair squeaked a little when she sat in it—hardly a noise at all, but enough to wake Buster. There he stood in his rumpled pajamas, hair on end, saying stupidly, "What? What's the matter?"

She was furious with him. "Nothing. Nothing at all. I just couldn't fall asleep," she lied.

"Aw, come on, Ma. Don't sit around and brood. That don't accomplish a thing." He bumbled around, turning on lights. "I'll make you some tea, or something. Hot milk. Would you like hot milk?"

"Get out of here!" she shrilled, scurrying after him, pushing him aside, to turn the lights off again. "Nothing I want, but you should get out of here and leave me alone."

"Well," he stood with his big hands hanging down at his sides, looking bewildered. "You don't have to get so mad." And slouched off to bed again.

Mrs. Vidich felt contrite. After all, Buster was trying to be nice. It wasn't his fault if he didn't do anything right. He had had his father's example all those years. What could you expect?

She was busy in the kitchen before Buster woke next morning, making biscuits, frying sausages and eggs—his favorite breakfast—by way of apology.

"I wouldn't stay, Ma," he said with his mouth full. "A dozen times I've been ready to go, but I worry. Everything's done. Pa's things are out of the way. The yard is in good shape. You can have the Finley boy cut the grass, and I'll come around often. You can take care of yourself, I know that, I see that. But I worry about the nights. What if you get sick in the night, and no one here to take care of you right away?"

"I could call you. I could call the Finleys."

"But what if you couldn't? What if you couldn't even get to the telephone? I hate to leave and have you alone here at night."

He could see by her frown that he had touched on something that worried her, too. She had

read of people who died and mouldered for weeks before anyone thought to break the door down and get to them. Stinking mess that would be! She didn't want that to happen in her house. She had no fear of violence or sickness or death—only of remaining undiscovered. "I thought of getting someone to stay with me nights."

"Well, who?" She shook her head, and they both sat without speaking for several moments. Suddenly Buster had an idea, pushed his chair back from the table as though he would put it into action immediately. "What about that oldest Finley boy? The one who cuts the grass? I bet he'd love to have his own room. He could have my room, and I'd. . ."

Mrs. Vidich shook her head strenuously. "No, Not him. Wouldn't have him around." Buster looked crestfallen. She didn't tell Buster, but she had decided not to have that boy cut the grass any more either. She hated him, hated the way he was growing up. Fifteen now, black fuzz discoloring his upper lip. When he worked, he hung his shirt on a low branch and swaggered around her yard in his tight black pants, sweat running down his hairless chest. She hated the way he looked, the way he looked at her. She was old, she didn't want to have to think about things like that any more. She hated the way he looked around her yard, her house, as though it belonged to him, and he wasn't just cutting the grass at a dollar an hour. She hated the way he looked around at the tools and things in the garage when he put the mower away. Still she would not let Mr. Vidich keep the garage locked, reasoning that, if they were locked out of the house by accident and it rained or snowed, they could take shelter in the garage until help came. "But I'll lock the garage now," she said to Buster.

"What?"

"I'll lock the garage and hide a key to the house some place. Under the doormat maybe. I'll tell you where when I make up my mind."

Buster got up from the table. To show his gratitude for the good breakfast, he cleared the dishes from his place at the table. His little mother got to her feet and took them from him before he could put them in the sink. Left without this chore, he looked around for something else to do, noticed the plants on the ledge of the kitchen window, sickly, drooping, dusty. He looked closer and saw that the soil was brick-hard. Before she knew what he was up to, he filled a milk bottle with water, and filled each clay pot brimfull. His mother descended on him, reached to grab the bottle from him, and only knocked it from his hand. It rebounded



from the cabinet top and shattered on the floor.

"Oh, you stupid. . .! You. . .can't you do anything right?"

"Ma!" he pleaded. "The plants were dying. I thought you had forgotten to water them, and so I was only. . ."

"If I had wanted them to be watered, I would have done it. I don't need you to tell me what needs doing and what doesn't. Nice mess you've made."

"Well, here. Take it easy. I'll get the broom."

"You get out. That's all I want you to do. Just get out." He turned, opened the back door and took a step, but she screamed at him, "Come back here! Get your suitcase and everything else. I mean get out! Go home now! I've had enough!"

"Well, that goes for both of us." He strode through the water and glass on the floor without apology.

The plants straightened up, thanks to Buster's hasty attention, but after that Mrs. Vidich let them dry up and die, just to show him.

When Mrs. Finley came to call after the funeral, she brought her twelve-year-old daughter Marietta with her, a pale stick of a girl with straight shoulder length hair and a small pretty face. Mrs. Vidich had observed Marietta evenings sitting quietly on the couch reading, while the others wrestled and scrambled around, and it occurred to her that this girl might like to leave that madhouse of a family and stay quietly with her at night. She thought a proposition like this should be made officially, formally, not in the back yard over the hedge, so she washed up, put on her corset and stockings, dressed carefully, wearing rouge and lipstick, went down the walk from her door to the sidewalk, and up their walk to their front door like any stranger. When she was ushered into their shabby livingroom it was like coming on stage for a scene she had watched from the wings many times. Mrs. Finley came to the door smoothing her dress, patting her hair into place, picking up toys, newspapers, shoes. Mrs. Vidich made her proposal, Mrs. Finley called Marietta and repeated it to her. "Well, what do you think?" she asked heartily, not knowing what to think herself.

Marietta glanced from one to the other and then looked down. "I wouldn't mind," she said softly.

She came into Mrs. Vidich's house that evening with her cotton pajamas under her arm. "And your clothes for tomorrow?"

"I'll go home. I'll wear these."

"Do you want to take a bath?" Mrs. Vidich

would like to have required a bath and a shampoo before the child got into her bed, but didn't feel she could the first thing. That night, after Marietta was asleep, Mrs. Vidich watched the Finleys. The girl wasn't missed in the rumpus in the livingroom, but it was obvious that Mr. and Mrs. Finley were having some sort of discussion. He was waving his arms, smacking his fist into his palm. It was exciting to think that they might be talking about *her*.

The arrangement worked nicely. In a few days Mrs. Vidich had persuaded Marietta to bring some clothes over and put them in the empty dresser drawers that had once held Buster's clothing. Mrs. Vidich inspected them when Marietta was gone during the day. Washed out, spiritless clothing, missing buttons and ties, seams open, hems down. "Now I'm going to show you how to sew. How to sew on buttons, how to put a hem in." Mrs. Vidich would not let the sulky child leave in the morning until all was in order in her dress. She gave her breakfast first. She gave her breakfast every morning, and a snack of cookies and milk or cocoa every night before bed. It seemed to her that the girl looked healthier, was filling out. Then she realized that that might be expected at Marietta's age.

Over a cup of cocoa with a marshmallow, Mrs. Vidich asked, "You haven't grown up yet, have you?" Marietta looked puzzled and did not answer, and Mrs. Vidich explained, "You haven't come due, have you?"

Marietta shook her head, looking down at the cup of cocoa she was stirring. Mrs. Vidich continued, "Because I don't want any of that mess in my bed. I got a good mattress—cost Mr. Vidich ninety-five dollars, may he rest in peace—and good sheets, and I don't want any of that." She nodded vehemently. "And no boy friends. You just stay with me, and read your books, and never mind about boys. They just want one thing anyhow. Don't you take anything from any boys. Don't take any of them pills either. Just don't take anything from any boys and you'll be all right."

Other evenings they talked about other things. Marietta recounted in exact detail movies she had seen, books she had read. Mrs. Vidich told Marietta all about how it was to be a girl when *she* was young, and described the members of her family, the school she had gone to, the men she might have married instead of Mr. Vidich.

In an old suitcase on a shelf in her closet Mrs. Vidich found several cotton housedresses that were good as new, but that had gotten too tight on her some years back. She had them waiting for Marietta that evening. "Good as new. Your mother can make them over for you. See? Just

take them up at the waist, turn up the hem." She held one up against the girl's body.

Marietta said coolly, "I'll take them home, but my mother will probably give them to the Salvation Army."

At first Mrs. Vidich was angry. "Salvation Army! Indeed!" The Finleys were poor, anybody could see that. You didn't have to peek in windows to see that. They could make good use of these clothes if they weren't so proud. What right did they have to be so proud? Then she thought, "Well, how do I know what Mrs. Finley would say? I'm sure she'd be grateful. It's only this child that is so proud. Probably dying for something new and thinks she won't get it if she has these things." After a while she thought, "I could buy her something new. Maybe I will." It occurred to her that perhaps Marietta had outsmarted her, was gambling all along on the probability that Mrs. Vidich would buy her something new. "No. She couldn't think so. Why would I? I'll show her! I will!"

"Marietta," Mrs. Vidich said, "you've been a good girl, haven't you?" Marietta nodded suspiciously. "And you're going to be a good girl." There was a pause, then Mrs. Vidich said, "Tomorrow morning after breakfast we'll go up in town and buy something. We'll buy something for you. Something new. Something you really want. How will that be?"

Marietta looked at Mrs. Vidich in honest disbelief. When the old woman kept nodding and repeating "Something new. Something you pick out for yourself. Something you really want," she jumped up from the kitchen table, ran around and hugged Mrs. Vidich, and then ran from the room to her bedroom and slammed the door. Mrs. Vidich was touched, but she couldn't help thinking, "Shouldn't have slammed the bedroom door. Not polite."

After breakfast next morning they walked into town, Marietta pacing herself to the old woman's slow steps. She would not hold her hand. Mrs. Vidich decided to take her to Helen's Shoppe where she knew values were good and prices low since she had bought things for herself there many times. On the way they passed Bimrose Kolonial Furniture store, and suddenly Marietta slipped from Mrs. Vidich's side and darted to the big window. "There!" she pointed breathlessly. "That's what I want!"

Mrs. Vidich walked across the sidewalk slowly to see. "What?" She peered incredulously at the display, back at Marietta. There was no doubt that the girl was pointing to a small pink lamp, a fake kerosene lamp, a bulbous shiny bottom with a black wire coiled out from it, and a translucent pink chimney. The switch was an or-

nate gold key projecting from the joint of chimney and base. The whole thing was no more than eight inches high.

"That's what I want." Marietta started eagerly for the door of the store.

Mrs. Vidich did not follow. "That! But I didn't mean anything like that!" Marietta returned slowly to her, her face pulled together rigidly, smaller than ever. Mrs. Vidich continued calmly, "I mean, something practical. Something to wear. We'll go to Helen's. . ."

"But you said, something I would pick out. Something I want."

"But something practical. Not like that." She gestured toward the lamp. "That's the kind of thing for a birthday, or Christmas, if you have been a very good girl." She started off again. "We'll have to see about that." Marietta stood for a moment, then followed slowly, a few steps behind.

Mrs. Vidich told the saleswoman in Helen's what they were looking for, and the woman pulled out a handful of cotton dresses. Mrs. Vidich looked them over, fingered the fabrics, compared the price tags. She held up one—sturdy blue checked material, wouldn't show soil easily, chaste high neckline and long sleeves—extended it toward Marietta. "Well, here we are. Try it on. Try this one on first."

Marietta stood looking at the carpeting, her hair partly covering her face. She shook her head. "I'm not going to try on that one. I'm not going to try on any. I'm going to go home."

Mrs. Vidich stepped toward her menacingly, but the girl did not move. "We didn't come up here for nothing. I know what you're thinking about. You can't make me buy that lamp for you by acting this way. If you act like this, what makes you think I'll buy anything—that lamp or this dress or anything—for you? Now or any time?"

"My mother won't let me. She won't let me take presents from anybody."

Mrs. Vidich expelled breath in a loud "Shaw!" She smiled grimly. "I know your mother. I'll talk to her about it, and we'll see what she says. She didn't say anything of the kind. It's just your own stubbornness." She felt that she was talking too loud and strong, that the saleswoman and other customers might find this a strange scene. She looked around to see if anyone was watching, allowed a softer smile to relax her face and said philosophically, "Life isn't like that. You listen to me. You're not going to get everything in this world just because you ask for it. You'll end up with nothing at all." She thought she detected a slight relenting in Marietta's posture, shook the dress at her and said,



"Try it on. Just try it on. You don't have to take it if you don't want it. Lord knows I'm not going to spend my money that way. Try and talk you into something you don't want. I just thought this dress would look so sweet on you." She handed it over to Marietta and sat down to wait.

Marietta tried on several dresses, found herself enjoying it, looking pretty in the mirror, posing this way and that. She liked the feel of the materials, their new smell. There were dresses she liked better than the blue, but she knew that was Mrs. Vidich's selection, and decided to please the old woman by choosing it. Mrs. Vidich seemed not to notice that it was a little long, but Marietta knew she could turn the hem up herself, now that she had learned how.

After Mrs. Vidich had slowly fished out crumpled bills and counted the change twice, and the cashier was wrapping the package, the old woman turned to Marietta and asked, "And what do you say?"

"Thank you, Mrs. Vidich. Thank you very much."

"That's right," Mrs. Vidich nodded happily. "And a little kiss, too, don't you think?" She pointed to a spot on her rouged wrinkled cheek.

Marietta approached, put her lips drily to the flesh for a split second. When Mrs. Vidich turned away to take the package, Marietta rubbed the chalky feel, sweetish scent, from her mouth with the back of her hand, then held her hands out to receive her gift.

That night Mrs. Vidich could hardly wait until Marietta went to bed so that she could take up her position at the diningroom window. She watched the Finley children through their usual horseplay, impatient for them to be off to bed so that their parents could get ready for bed. Mr. Finley had decided that he was putting on too much weight, and had started to do exercises at bedtime, much to Mrs. Vidich's amusement. She enjoyed this more than watching them make love, to see Mr. Finley, naked as the day he was born, as he bent to try and touch his toes, his fat butt in the air, that thing hanging down between his legs. She had to cover her mouth with both her hands to keep from shouting with laughter.

She was so transported by this spectacle that she did not hear Marietta come into the diningroom until the child said slowly, "You're watching us. You're watching Mama and Papa."

Mrs. Vidich stammered, "No. No. I . . . I . . . was seeing if it is raining. Going to close the window if it is raining." But she did not move to do so.

Marietta shook her head. "I've been here a long

time. You're just standing there watching Mama and Papa. You watch us all the time."

"No! I don't watch. . . I was going to watch. . . television." She took a step toward the livingroom. "I couldn't sleep, and I got up to watch television. That's it."

She turned on the set, fell into the easy chair, heart pounding. She thought she might become ill, put her hand to her chest. Marietta sat on the floor in front of her, facing the television, outlined, silhouetted by the blue glow of the screen where men on horses raced and fought on a dusty street.

Mrs. Vidich stared at the back of the girl's head. Finally she said softly, "Marietta." The girl did not turn toward her. "Marietta," she repeated. "You're a good girl. I've been good to you, haven't I? I didn't buy that little lamp today, but I bought you a pretty dress, didn't I?"

"There was a dress I liked better than the dress you bought me."

"Well, we'll see," Mrs. Vidich said weakly.

"I liked another dress better. I really liked the little lamp." Marietta still focused on the television. "It would look real pretty in my room here."

"Some other day we'll go and see about that lamp. See how much it costs. Tomorrow maybe. If I don't get sick. If I don't get so upset that I get sick. Marietta!" she cried.

Marietta slowly slid backwards on the rug until she sat at Mrs. Vidich's feet, slightly to the right. She put her elbow up on the old woman's knees and turned her head, shaking her hair back so that Mrs. Vidich could see the broad grin on her face. Then she turned back to watch the program, resting her head on Mrs. Vidich's lap.

Mrs. Vidich stroked her hair. "That's right. A good girl," she said feebly. "I always knew. And you'll see, you'll see."

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## ENDANGERED SPECIES

Patricia Roth Schwartz

Martha, in her plain sunny kitchen, all bare scrubbed butcher block, moves back and forth from countertop to desk to wall-phone, waiting, busily, for Hanna, her daughter, to arrive. She knows that Hanna is never prompt, will not therefore waste a precious droplet of time herself. Time to Martha seems often inadequate to the tasks it must contain, as an oasis pool to irrigate a desert; still, she perseveres.

"Hello, Joyce? Martha. I'm calling to remind you about the rally Thursday. Yes. Can you call the others on your list? Thank you."

Hanging up, she reaches for the plastic bag of raisins and sunflower seeds, mentally calculating whether she'll have enough for the two pans of Crunchy Granola Bars, one for her affinity group training that night, one for the fundraiser Saturday. They were boycotting the A&P. If necessary, would there be time to run to the food co-op for more seeds? Her eye moves to the





large calendar tacked up by the bulletin board above her desk which lies inches deep in petitions. Days, boxed, march across the calendar; red lettering scrawled through most of them: time, filled with activity, purpose, effort, the pages ahead, the ones she hasn't turned over yet, yawn empty, white, full of potential terror.

Martha fishes the fat red marker from the ceramic cup glazed with a leaping dolphin. She charts a few maneuvers into the week ahead. Reassured that all that's needed is possible, she turns back to the sunflower seeds.

As Hanna's old Karmann Ghia rattles to a halt outside, Martha starts, runs a hand — despite herself — through her short, no-nonsense hair, tugs at her denim skirt, fleetingly, desperately, wishing she'd worn something floaty and brightly-colored (though nothing she owns remotely fits this description.)

As Hanna's voice, "Mother! I'm here!" pierces the day, panic, a hot blade, slices her gut. "Mother!" Hanna, as always, overwhelms, her voice, her scent (musk oil?), the clouds of her hair, dark, loose, wild curls, her various drifting brilliant layers of ornament and dress, her hugs.

Martha submits. Tea is put on. They sit. "No, thanks," Hanna pushes away the mug, "I brought this instead." She produces a bottle of Greek wine from her capacious, untidy bag. To Martha, sipping as they face each other across the breakfast nook table, the liquid Hanna pours tastes like vinegar.

"When I was in Crete, we drank this endlessly! I was thrilled to find some just the other day in Harvard Square. So, Mother, how *are* you? How are all your Causes?" As she talks, Hanna sifts through stacks of thick envelopes: the desk and the nook table are the only clutter piles Martha permits. "Morris Udall, Ellie Smeal, Teddy Kennedy, Gloria Steinem. . . Mother, you have the most illustrious correspondents!" Hanna's hearty tone contains no malice, only her constant eagerness for a good laugh. With her mother, she knows few will be forthcoming. Irony seems her surest bet to redeem the afternoon.

"Hanna—" How Martha hates the prim, cold tone the presence of her only offspring always produces. Every so often, in a rare self-reflective moment, she wonders, "How ever did such a creature come to me?" She feels far more nurturing of the tiny brown-nut face in the photograph Save the Children has sent, identifying "Maria" as the grateful recipient of her fifteen dollars a month. Even the whooping cranes and the whales Hanna loves to mock seem far more in need of Martha's care than her own child.

Martha remembers once ripping open yet another of the fat creamy envelopes that jam her

mailbox daily—bringing into the heart of suburban Wayland the details of torture in the Middle East, illiteracy on Mesa Flats, black lung in Harlan County—to see a picture of a bludgeoned, bloody baby seal, the mother hovering nearby, mute and bewildered with grief, and how she herself began to cry and cry and couldn't stop.

Those moods, thank Providence, were rare.

Martha takes another sip; the wine has not improved. "Hanna—" she starts again, "what I'm—we all—are trying to do is important work. You are an educated young woman—" A sore point: Hanna had left Radcliffe for The Art Institute, that, for an astonishing number of bed partners. "—You are certainly aware. Surely you must put aside some time to read the papers; the latest unemployment statistics have just been released—quite shocking—and Helen Caldicott spoke last week at Brandeis about the escalating arms race—" She begins to sound, even to herself, wound to the snapping point.

"Mother!" Hanna jingles her silver bracelets, bought on a hitchhiking tour of Mexico. "I'm not putting you down! I just wish sometimes you'd forget all this 'Save the World' crap and think about *yourself*! When's the last time you took some space for you?"

Hanna's vocabulary, to her mother's ear, has steadily corrupted itself ever since her parents agreed to fund her therapy. Hanna rejected Wayland Psychological Associates for a women's counseling collective in Cambridge. Martha answers primly.

"I'm in no need of a vacation, thank you, dear. I do very little these days, actually, now that the referendum is over. All we're working on now is the nuclear issue—that being the most crucial, of course. My affinity group meets tonight. We've received training should we be arrested when we go to the sub base. You know, I believe," suddenly she feels moved to reach out blindly, wildly toward this creature born of her, yet so foreign to her, knowing that Hanna soon could leap forever past her grasp, "my group must be something like that woman's support group you go to—"

"Yes, it really must be. I never thought of it that way." Hanna smiles warmly, reaches for her mother's hand.

Martha feels a rare flood of love for this hearty, overwhelmingly healthy creature who emerged grinning on the exact date she was due, spent summers at sleepover camp at eight, kayaked the Colorado at thirteen, lost her virginity ("no blood," Hanna had casually bragged) at fifteen.

"Mother—" Hanna continues, "Mom—I have something special to tell you."

In a flush of rare emotion, pleased with the success of the afternoon, Martha allows herself to slump back a little. The sips of wine, though small, have clouded her head.

"Wonderful. I love news of your life." Usually a lie—yet what more shocking news could reach her now? The married Harvard professor had been the worst—except perhaps the summer spent in a cave in Crete after the tuition refund from the Lycee. Pregnancy or V.D. Martha does not fear. Hanna is never irresponsible or careless—only bold and self-indulgent.

"It's my new lover."

"Oh? Not another Geoffrey, I hope?" The professor left his wife soon after beginning to see Hanna. Hanna refused marriage; Geoffrey entered analysis; the affair collapsed.

"No, Mother, no!" Hanna is laughing. "Far, far from it! No, I just wanted to share—" (Martha suppresses a wince.) "—that I am in love now, maybe for the first time ever. I felt you'd be pleased. I know you and Daddy have never stood in my way, but I'm aware that you think I take sex and relationships too casually."

Martha is silent.

"Her name is Shell."

The silence lengthens. Martha, who is capable of hearing endless stories about babies in East Africa starving; political prisoners in various totalitarian regimes being forced to talk under electric shock; which dyes and chemicals cause which kinds of cancer; how the very earth itself would come apart should certain five-star generals tap a certain red button, finds herself unable now to take in what her ears receive. Finally, "I'm not sure, Hanna, what it is that you're saying."

Through all this Hanna has been beaming.

"That I'm in love, Mother. That my lover is a woman. That we're very, very happy. That I've finally found a joy I didn't know was possible!"

"Then—are you," Martha's mind scrambles wildly through her memories of every demonstration, pamphlet, speech for something that would help. "—Are you — gay? You've never brought this up before. You've always—seen—so many men—"

"Well, Mom—" Hanna's stretching now, wide purple sleeves drifting off her arms, the insides of which gleam, mottled and pale like the skins, Martha realizes suddenly, of baby seal. "You know how I hate labels—but if I must have one, then, yes, why not? Not 'gay' —that always makes me think of men in pushup bras and eyeshadow. 'Lesbian' —yes—lesbian'. Sounds lovely, doesn't it? When should I bring Shell for dinner?"

"But—but—" Martha has no idea how to feel, to behave, to respond. She had been taught, has taught Hanna in turn, to feel no disgust for any human choice, to respect all life that involves love as sacred. Hanna has always been full of a passion for all creatures—goldfish, mice, playmates of different colors, yes, even married Harvard professors—with sincerity and ingenuousness. Martha does not for a moment doubt the depth of her daughter's feelings for this—this Shell—whoever she is.

Rather, Martha can't help shying away from any real grappling with the sexual nature. Her own life in that regard remains limited and underdeveloped. Edward, her husband, chief paleontologist at the Museum of Natural History, has been a compatible mate. After the conception of Hanna—their only moment of blaze—each had retired to a twin bed, coupling, briefly, wistfully, at distant intervals, neither having the heart to tell the other they'd rather not. Desire, instead, for Martha, finds full expression through a stack of completed petitions thrust into a senator's hand, or when, on a long, parching march the pain of one's blisters becomes entirely submerged by the full-throated rise of angry, unified, hopeful voices.

Her immediate second flood of feelings is fear: this earth—a fact not fully realized by Hanna, blessed from birth by vitamins, comforters, Montessori schools, the green illusion of suburbia—is dangerous. Martha, early, learned this from her father, a frail upright, gentle, Unitarian/Universalist minister, who died a bit before his time of (she had always believed) a truly broken heart. In the same year that Martin Luther King was shot, Gene McCarthy defeated, his church was vandalized by a young addict he had sponsored. Years beside her mother at dinners listening to visiting ministers speak of apartheid, Appalachia, voter registration, Martha had yearned, as all adolescents, to run away—not to N.Y. or L.A., but to Mississippi. Her senior thesis at Earlham was on the causes of the Nazi Holocaust. On her postgraduation trip to Europe she left her traveling companions in a Munich beer garden to make a pilgrimage to Dachau.

Now, here, in suburban Wayland, whose lilac bushes, Volvos in driveways, trim, clipped hedges, whole families in White Stag jogging suits out in the summer twilight, it seems as far from that awesome spot of earth, sifted deep in human ashes, as Shangri-La. Martha feels gripped—for her baby, her own—with old terror.

"Hanna—this is all right with me. Not that what I think or feel has ever influenced you. . ."

"Not true, Mother! We're really a lot alike."



"Now, let me finish. I'm glad you're happy, and I hope this girl—woman—is good for you—but we don't live in as enlightened a world as we might. I know Anita Bryant was a laughing stock, but there are others—more serious, and sinister. People have lost jobs, apartments. . ."

"Mother! No one's going to fire me for being queer!" Hanna earned a good living as a nude model for The Art Institute. "All the male teachers are queer themselves! As to my apartment, two dykes live downstairs, and—"

"Hanna! Such language! Surely homosexuals—I mean, gays—lesbians—whatever—" Martha's mind reels now, full-speed away from seals lying in blood, crematorium smoke, burning crosses, toward new images. "These terms have been used to degrade, and as you say, this is a happy choice for you—nothing to be ashamed of—"

"Mother!" Hanna is really laughing now, pouring herself more wine. "'Dyke' means something good! We reclaim it like black kids call themselves 'nigger'. It means 'strong, powerful woman.'"

Martha has already ceased to listen. Instead, she is focused utterly on the mental image of her calendar, and how to make space for new and pressing priorities.

By the time Shell comes to dinner, Martha has already subscribed to Gay Community News, joined the National Gay Task Force, and (due to her formidable past experience) has been elected Ways and Means Chairwoman of the Greater Boston Chapter of Parents of Gays. She has thoroughly shocked the local Wayland librarians by her unselfconscious combing of the stacks for every possible relevant text. She has begun therapy with a slightly nervous social worker at Wayland Psychological Associates who seems to ask many questions about her mother—or is it her father? Martha can never remember.

In deference to his lifelong residence in the Jurassic Period, Edward has not been told; which meetings his wife attends do not, anyway, stick in his mind. Martha remembers, during their courtship, asking him why the dinosaurs became extinct. As he answered, she saw (for the first and only time) a mist of tears gather in his eyes. It was why she married him. Now memories of that vulnerability find protection under her own facade of competence.

She catches herself, often now, in the Star Market, in the library, waiting rooms, looking at women: questioning, testing, wondering — then, pulling herself up sharply, visualizing instead, her calendar and the steady wall of days in red banked against Armageddon. It helps.

On the humid, late June Saturday that gays and

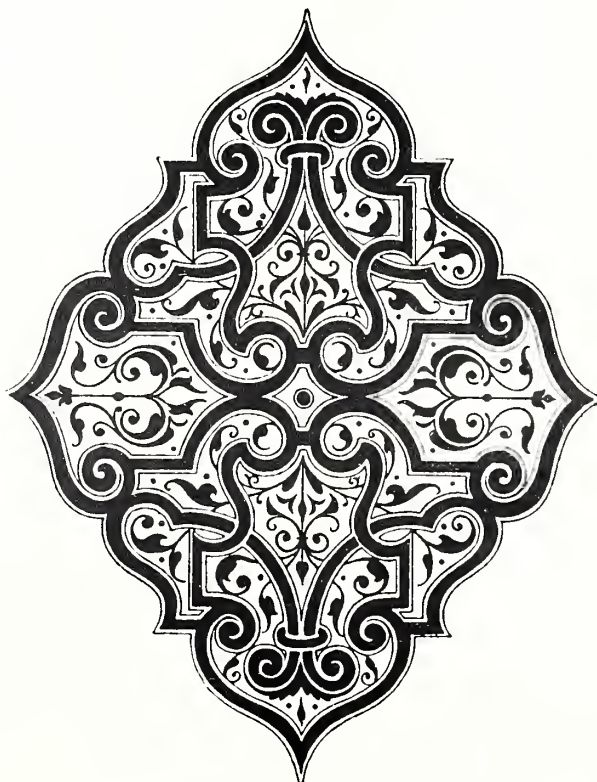
Parents of Gays—Martha herself has helped to sew the felt banner, clucking and cooing over more wallet-size pictures of delicate boys than she had thought possible—march through the streets of Boston to demand their rights, Martha feels new vigor. It's been a long time since she marched; that time "War is not healthy for children and other living things" was emblazoned on her placard. Sweat pours off her brow, her throat (from shouting "Two-Four-Six-Eight-Gay is Just as Good as Straight") rasps itself raw. As she follows the bobbing mass of heads, purple balloons, streaming banners shaking before her to a disco beat as far as the eye can see, she feels the surge of that old familiar passion.

Above the street in the bedroom of an attic apartment in Cambridge, oblivious to the date or the event downtown, Hanna and Shell twine in the aftermath of love. Each seeks the other's eye, each traces with a finger-tip silver pathways of moisture from brow to cheek to shoulder to breast—and then, curled and secure as babies, they sleep.

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## DIANE ARBUS: NAKED WOMAN WITH HARLEQUIN GLASSES

What makes it wrong is of course  
the glasses. As in this other one,  
the fat middle-aged couple smirks obscenely  
because of the TV set, the Sears chairs,  
the cheap prints on the walls. These things mean death,  
not the flesh, even thickened ankles  
and thighs, beneath the leaves,  
beside the stream,  
not the leaves themselves, the intercourse  
of light and shade, the moss,  
the green and brown smell of the woods.

So if we go naked, let it be  
without clothes.

Janet McCann

### 2 A.M.

it's been so long since  
I called someone at 2 a.m., we  
didn't have kids & it would be 1 apt.  
to another, black lines across the city  
or across the towns, the fields & fences  
between my city and yours. the lines  
were greyhound buses streaking  
across the night, our voices  
flickering in our cold kitchens like those  
old fourth-of-july pinwheels kids once had.  
it's been so long, and it's  
2 a.m. now, but I don't know  
anyone to call, even in Cal. where  
it's earlier and not beyond reason.  
outside the streetlight makes a long  
elliptical patch of light on the  
suburban pavement, a stray tom  
howls in the hedge. no one has a light on,  
no one, the old man who used to work  
in his workshop all night sawing and  
singing is dead now and the boy  
across the street who studied has gone  
to the seminary. I think of calling you  
but that would be unthinkable, your wife  
would answer a harsh, angry hello,  
hello, who is this, and you would  
worry: the parents? the kids?  
the wailing cat is up against  
the window now, wanting to  
mate with my Persian.  
the cat outside wants in.  
the cat inside wants out.

Janet McCann



*Picasso, Seated Woman, 1924*



## THE MUSE

Sometimes you glimpse her waving  
from a dwindling landscape  
but she will disappear  
before your eyes  
before your eyes and lips  
have settled

Or she will lean against you  
whispering  
your pulses pounding  
but before you can embrace  
she has departed

No use to call her name  
from tops of towers  
Speak it low in the sacred caves,  
savor the echo,  
listen

dream of water, murmur oms,  
then wait until it's time;  
a lone vibration one day will meet  
that high heartbeat  
and crack the mountainsides.

Lillian Morrison

## REGGAE BEAT

Time to slow the beat  
Of my pace down  
To reggae sound.

The tradewinds  
Of Montego Bay.  
Irie.

A body black  
As the air sweet.  
His words lingered heavily  
Like the curl of ganja smoke.  
His presence a balm  
That made me calm,  
Soothing my burns  
From exposures  
To colder suns  
Of yesterday.  
I felt in his eyes  
The comfort,  
The warmth  
Of being wrapped in the dark,  
Naked.

Irie.

Susan Imperial

## OLD, OLD LADY

The rooms in her small apartment  
are now too large,  
the distances to bed and table  
too far, the place,  
a spooky grand hotel  
of frightening shadows.

Tottering, tiny,  
she'd like to slip  
into a cradle, tucked in  
by momma, and be rocked  
gently back, gently, gently  
into a small warm darkness.

Lillian Morrison

## K-MART

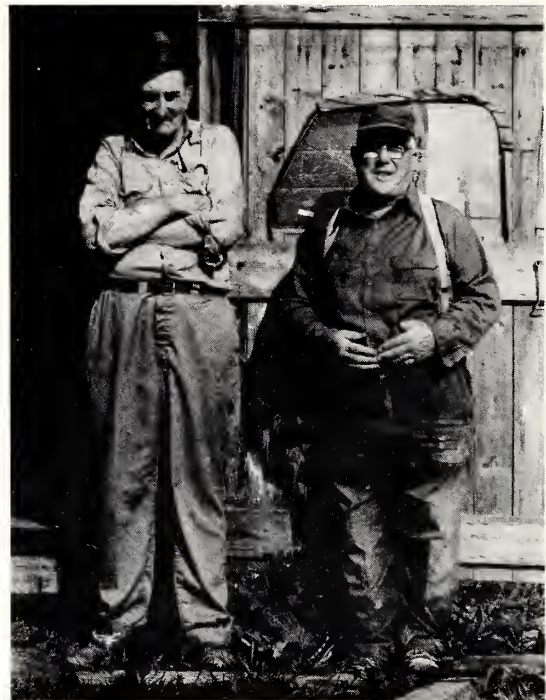
Men's black umbrellas, \$2.98. Limit three per customer.

But I want the whole shipment, uncrate them  
straight from the truck into my arms. I need them all—  
one for each room, the hall, the baths, the yard.  
They will be bats, mourning kites, wrecked Amish  
carriages, sad tents. They will be nuns,  
they will be witches. I will drop the rest  
from a plane over my town, they will drift down  
between the raindrops, hover over my street,  
blow down the gutters, hang on all the trees.  
Neighbors will think the Ptarmigans have come.  
People who haven't spoken now for years  
will break their silence. When the sun comes out  
my black umbrellas will join into a flock  
and all fly north, pumping wind like bellows.  
We'll watch from all the windows,  
once more holding hands.

Janet McCann



Raymond Bial



Raymond Bial

## FIRST FROST

Poems by Kathryn Kerr

Photographs by Raymond Bial

Urbana, Illinois: Stormline Press, 1985

Reviewed by Duke Rank

In America, the "mainstream" myth of rural life still combines the idealized family farm with the romanticized small town. Despite the realities today of small towns often being dependent on union-busting sub-contractors, or the rural poor watching David Letterman's Yuppie humor on late-night TV, most Americans still like to believe in a fantasy of a Golden Era, of a rural America quite like Norman Rockwell paintings and Walt Disney's sanitized Main Street. Every year we get a glut of Thanksgiving Day and pre-Christmas TV specials celebrating the virtues of simpler days. Whittier's "Snowbound" probably started this genre when he romanticized the "good old days" which were already past it seemed to him writing in the industrialized 1860s. Yet, midwesterners, especially Hoosiers (such as Edward Eggleston, Booth Tarkington, and James Whitcomb Riley — "Blessings on thee little man, Barefoot boy with cheek of tan") aided and abetted the nostalgic glorification of rural life.

Midwestern realism, in contrast, is still a smaller tributary, despite a long and honorable tradition dating back to Hamlin Garland, through the novels of Willa Cather, Ruth Suckow, and Ole Rolvaag; the short stories of Sherwood Anderson, and the poetry of Edgar Lee Masters. But

this tradition of sharp, sometimes blunt, realism lives today as the lives of hardscrabble survivors have their chronicler in the poetry of Kathryn Kerr and their portrait in the photographs of Raymond Bial.

*First Frost* is a handsome book, well crafted and carefully printed, a collection of two dozen poems and 18 black and white photographs. Half of the poems are in "traditional" free verse (an oxymoron? You know what I mean, ragged right margins); half are in prose paragraphs. Ah, but what prose: well chosen concrete details, rich and textured, evoking childhood memories, and sharply rendered scenes suggesting a context far beyond the page.

Bial's photographs of rusted buckets, Mason jars, and grain elevators make commonplaces into new places; his people are interesting, provocative, disturbing, almost Flannery O'Connor characters as envisioned by Grant Wood. (My neighbors just down the road a piece on Highway 57.) We get to look at them longer and closer than we would stare at strangers in real life, and with that time, we learn some things about them. So too with the poetry. We learn from these interesting accounts of childhood, of violence and covert sexuality, and we have a new insight into these good people who "waste nothing, need little."

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*Dr. Rank is professor of English at Governors State University where he teaches and writes poetry. His most recently published volume of poetry is Sea of Cortez.*





GABRIELLE BURTON  
WINNER OF THE MAXWELL PERKINS PRIZE

## HEARTBREAK HOTEL

Gabrielle Burton

New York: Scribners, 1986

Emily Wasiolek

Gabrielle Burton's *Heartbreak Hotel* has won the 1986 Maxwell Perkins Prize, awarded each year to a first novel of exceptional merit. Diane O'Hehir calls the novel "a wild and sad and funny trip through every woman's lives and losses." Gloria Steinen tells us we'll "gasps in recognition—and laugh and laugh"; and Fay Weldon says this novel "does more for women (not to mention literature) than anything I have read for a decade."

Such extravagant praise is merited, both because of the strikingly original content, and for its innovative form. The content is very much feminist, and in large part a review of the indignities to which women have been subjected and subjected themselves. There is a video quality to the rapid shifts of characters and scenes, and something of a collective stream-of-consciousness technique in the fragmentary and

associative way in which the particles of the feminine experience are exposed. I suspect that Burton wants to impress us with how unified the history of the female experience has been: how much the past and the present have been one.

Burton's fictional world may seem confusing at first because the seven main characters are introduced simultaneously. Rapid bits of information about them are flashed before the reader like puzzle pieces which only occasionally fit together. There are lists of what each character is wearing, or thinking, or doing:

Each woman has a flash of family:

Gretchen thinks of her Ma.

Pearl thinks of her Daddy.

Maggie thinks of her Gramma.

Meg thinks of her Uncle.

Daisy thinks of her ex-Mother Superior.

Upstairs, Rita thinks about her first cousin...

Each statement is syntactically self-contained, and if connections are to be made, the author does not make them for us. One gathers that the author wants to deconstruct those logical and repetitive links that organize our usual thinking. This discrete material comes gradually into focus and the reader begins to understand the situation of six women. They are recuperating at the *Heartbreak Hotel*, which the city wants to transform into a shelter for retarded adolescent boys. The main characters are: 1. Daisy, an ex-nun and ex-missionary, at present the atheist curator of the Museum and the most well-adjusted, forceful woman in the group. 2. Pearl, a divorced mother of five and a comic. 3. Rita, the beautiful, sensuous, promiscuous belly dancer. 4. Meg, the hard-nosed cop who adopts a little girl. 5. Gretchen, a cheerleader who is in constant dread of an impending visit from her mother. 6. Maggie, the simultaneous translator of languages who drinks too much. 7. Quasi, the albino, nearly blind, hunchback alter-ego of Margaret Valentine, curator, who smashes Meg's motorcycle and lies comatose in the hospital.

Six of these women are recuperating from their arduous jobs as tour guides for the twenty city-block-long Museum of the Revolution located in Buffalo, New York. Within the context of Burton's fictional world, the Museum of the Revolution or MOTR is a real museum where so many people visit that the politicians are perturbed and disturbed. Government funding has stopped and the city has issued an eviction notice. But it is clear, too, that this museum is a metaphor for women's past and present experiences. The museum is partially described as follows: "The Museum of the Revolution is where you take the

little children and show them girdles and miniskirts and garter belts and siliconed breasts and false fingernails and rubber asses and foot-binding shoes and sexist remarks and stereotyped textbooks and pornography and all the women who died in pregnancy and abortion and childbirth...and the sin of incuriosity about female physiology and Toni home permanents and wolf whistles and sweet sixteen parties...and pain and waste and tragedy and say, look closely and carefully, children, this is how it used to be."

Throughout this novel the subject matter and the stylistic devices continue to surprise and delight the reader. For example, there are long lists of women's experiences. These lists are in varying patterns: sometimes they are in sort of stanzaic free verse; other times the ideas come from a group discussion or a character's inner thoughts. Sometimes, the lists are brief; sometimes they continue for three or four pages.

The varied contents include lists of childhood remembrances, rules for being a good person, what it means to be a girl or how to be a good daughter. Here is an abbreviated example of "The Litany of The Lies Mothers Tell Their Daughters and Daughters Tell Their Mothers":

Mothers feeding their families in this order,  
 husbands, sons, daughters, themselves  
 Mothers who don't believe their daughter's  
 story of incest  
 Mothers averting their eyes from their married  
 daughter's bruises  
 Mothers reading their daughter's diaries  
 Mothers who won't let their daughters be sexual  
 creatures

...

Daughters who don't make trouble  
 Daughters who say their mothers are too old  
 to change  
 Daughters who don't say anything about their  
 mother's drinking  
 Daughters who stay silent about their mother's  
 lives  
 Daughters who don't let their mothers be  
 sexual creatures

More than the plot keeps the reader turning the pages; however, there are three suspenseful questions to be solved: will the women be forced to leave Heartbreak Hotel; will Quasi live or die; will the Museum be closed? But the most suspenseful question throughout is: will the reader understand that she is looking into the mirror of her own life. Will she recognize it, and absorb it? Will she understand that we share a heritage, and a future: that we too have been "particle-lized" and unread or unread sufficiently, that our history has been the lists that have

been poured and are being poured into our beings by others? *Heartbreak Hotel* is funny and tragic and most of all it is a travail of consciousness.

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*Emily Wasiolek teaches English Literature at Prairie State College. She has served on the Advisory Council of The Creative Woman since its inception, and has published both poetry and nonfiction in these pages.*

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A new feminist journal entitled BLAZE: THE INTIMATE VISION OF FEMINISM is looking for works on "Women and Creating" (Deadline April 21), "Love and Obsession" (Deadline July 21), and "Women and Sanity" (Deadline October 21). When submitting, make sure you specify for which issue you are submitting. BLAZE assures me that work from both men and women will be considered. Send your manuscripts with an SASE to the magazine c/o the editor Linda Berman, 8906 Santa Clara, Dallas, TX 75218.

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Fall 1987 Special Issue on  
NATIVE AMERICAN WOMEN

The theme of the issue will be the power that Native American Women wield in their communities and in their own lives—their abilities to make decisions and to influence the course of events in their lives and those of the people around them. Contributions will include discussions of political power at the tribal and national level, the power of knowledge to preserve traditions and identity, and the power of artistic expression to create a sensitivity to Indian cultures.

Send contributions before June 1, 1987 to Professor Clara Sue Kidwell, Guest Editor, 3415 Dwinelle Hall, University of California, Berkeley, CA 94720.



## EDITOR'S COLUMN

### A Decade of Publishing

When people ask me how *The Creative Woman* came to be, I tell them that it was a series of events, with one thing leading to another. First, an old friend from University of Chicago days, Judy Torney, called to ask if I would address the AAUW (American Association of University Women) at their Midwest Regional Conference. My assigned topic was "Women as Idea Inventors," and I had several months to prepare. After my presentation, the editor of the *AAUW Journal* asked for my script for publication in the *Journal*, where it appeared as "Women's Creativity" in 1976. Quite to my surprise, I received over a hundred letters from women who were stimulated by the article and wanted to share their own experiences and frustrations as they struggled toward self-expression in music, dance, poetry, teaching. What to do with all this mail? It deserved serious attention. I decided to send out a newsletter to all of them, telling them about each other, and setting up a kind of network for the exchange of ideas. Thus it was in the summer of '77 that a small group of us went to lunch, hosted by Ted Andrews, who was Acting Provost at that time, and launched *The Creative Woman*. The first issue was a twelve-page fold-over mailer. It contained news about women doing creative things across the country, poems, a bibliography of periodicals devoted to women's creative efforts, and short abstracts of the work of scholars in women's studies. The mailing list consisted of a hundred names, the women who had written to me.

Over the years we've examined many topics from a feminist perspective: wilderness, peace, law, third world, sailing, politics, history, healing, China, children, fine arts, performing arts, literature, religion, energy. We used to make every issue distinctively colorful, changing the colors of paper and ink; by the summer of '83 and the "men changing" issue, we seemed to have settled on the present format: a black-and-white glossy 48-page magazine. Literally hundreds of women, and a few men, have contributed to these pages. Some things have remained constant, most notably the elegant design of Suzanne Oliver, whose imagination and style have marked every issue. What lies ahead? We haven't run out of ideas yet! Future issues will deal with Native American Women, diarists, flying, education, entrepreneurs, the Gaia hypothesis, feminist theory and literary criticism and a "sisterhood is global" issue.

This spring and summer will see special events to celebrate our tenth anniversary. On April 17, we present Sydney Morris in a public lecture, "Emptiness and Form: Some Considerations on Quantum Physics and Liberal Religion," based on her Harvard Divinity School thesis. Other events are planned for later. All readers within driving (or flying) distance of Chicago are invited to come and celebrate with us.

### A Letter to Allegra

Mary Sidney and I were fortunate to study with Allegra Stewart at Butler University during our undergraduate days. We hoped she would be able to join us for the production of *She Always Said, Pablo*; afterwards we would go somewhere and talk about Gertrude Stein, our impressions of the theatrical performance, and perhaps understand a little more about this enigmatic genius with the help of a foremost Stein scholar. That was not to be. Nevertheless, as a kind of review, we offer here Mary's letter to our mentor:

Dear Allegra,

It is 8:15 A.M. and I'm sitting in the classroom (English/Humanities 101). My students are writing a final exam, solemnly at work on "Ulysses" (Tennyson, not Joyce) and "Mr. Flood's Party," and others. Sniffles and rustle of pages being turned. Outside the huge windows a gray March sky looks on gloomily. Brisk east wind. I have about 28 students in this class, two or three excellent ones, several hard cases, many not really convinced that poetry is worth bothering with. They liked the short stories.

Helen and I are sorry you couldn't get to Chicago and see *She Always Said, Pablo*. Let me tell you about it—

On Saturday, March 14, we made our way through a wet snowstorm—ice, slush, rain, snow—to the Goodman Theatre, a place I've always liked, part of the Art Institute of Chicago. We had good seats, front and center. Stage is bare except for a huge reproduction of Gertrude Stein. Music begins and a procession, very stately and beautiful, crosses the stage—the subjects of early Picasso paintings—circus people and a tawny-skinned nearly nude Minotaur. Alice B. Toklas appears at the side, middle-aged, prim and proper in black shapeless but elegant dress, comments in a dry voice, describes the relationship of Gertrude Stein and Picasso. Gertrude Stein is a youngish actress in a wheelchair who looks a bit Stein-ish in brown velvet



dress, short hair, and with one shoulder held higher than the other.

I can't tell you what happens. There is no plot. A series of skits (that's not a good word) follows. More characters appear: a beautiful woman in white who sings, Picasso, a youthful thick-set man in a matador's costume. Much singing and dancing, the stage aswirl in color, motion, music. Enigmatic remarks from Gertrude Stein and Alice, and I stop trying to understand. What I hear is unintelligible, incoherent, and repetitious but fun, especially "Miss Furr and Miss Skeen." (But a part of me remains suspicious and resentful—why don't I understand? Why can't I penetrate these mysteries? Is it some failure within me? Or is it fraud I'm watching?)

But I liked what I saw, incomprehensible as much of it was. I liked the corny bit of having Gertrude Stein in one scene holding a (toy) white poodle. So even Basket got into the show. Scenes I remember: Miss Furr and Miss

Skeen talking furiously, Alice kissing the Minotaur, Gertrude Stein sardonically commenting on Picasso's play, which was enacted before us.

After the performance, Steve Scott, director of arts and education at the Goodman, led a discussion of what we had witnessed, and I learned a few facts that probably everyone else knows. The most amusing was learning that Gertrude Stein studied repetition in an aunt's household where elderly visiting ladies repeated bits of conversation for the benefit of their hard-of-hearing companions.

In all, a vivid and entertaining evening. We missed you.

love,  
Mary

*Mary Sidney teaches English at the University of Illinois at Chicago.*



*Photo: Kevin Horan, from the Goodman Theatre's production of She Always Said, Pablo.*

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